
JESUS WANTED



collected and arranged by
PAWEŁ ZELWAN

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translated by

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Guest, sit beneath my leaves and rest at ease!

Jan Kochanowski, *On the Linden Tree*¹

It is easiest to evaluate the rank of a publication by weighing its cost and gravity. They don't have to appear significant if the output of human thought and will is the work of a genius or if it is brought to daylight by an appropriately selected collective, and its reception by all is mediated by a publisher who is prepared to receive it and knows the ropes.

They grow significantly, however, when it is being created by a workman in moments free from hard everyday work at a foundry, resisting with his own body the aversion and venality of his closest environment, who develops and implements the *production plan* of his ware by himself, paying for the necessary craftsmen's services out of his own pocket.

It isn't a fate that scholars, artists or writers dream of and, therefore, the Reader should understand that the compulsion that makes me the author, *typesetter* and publisher of this book doesn't give him much right over me in the judgment of its rank if he isn't prone to similar feats.

Still, this imperative doesn't bind the Reader in any way with my authorial fancy. It rather makes the secured space of the book a modest, but brisk and truth-friendly place for a footsore or stray guest. At most it seeks in the latter for an unconstrained impression that the authorial and publishing purpose was guided by quite commonsense, and even – I would say – noble-minded premises.

The tracks of this book will lead the Reader into the unknown. He will not only have to face in it the thick-set characteristics of an alien and slightly crippled speech, but, above all, the measure of knowledge adjoining its side, which will put his own to a serious test. He won't lose if he doesn't lie his way out of the fight, because this book serves only the ruin of the convictions that are abject. Instead, it strengthens and raises, in accordance with the great law, the spirits of the truly mighty men who aren't too eloquent nor too greedy.

¹ translated by Michael J. Mikos. Jan Kochanowski was a 16th-century Polish poet (translator's note).

Because it's not chaff for trained cattle, but food and drink for weary and thirsty people, the book – being, after all, quite good news – acts as a supportive gospel discourse, not so much telling the Reader to think in a certain way, but trying to gain his distracted attention for the goods which result in life with a clarity of conscience and thoughts, insofar as the latter are directed towards the Galilean.

The norms of this discourse stand out significantly from the stock evangelistic canvas, because they're not focused on the matters that have been known and repeated for ages by the callous media and their feverish flunkies, but on the very heart of the gospel message, which is the nerve of the messianic thought and will, constituting the best reference point for a salutary reorganization of life priorities.

Therefore, the Reader can calmly sidestep the contemporary theological bore stuffing the heads of those hungry for knowledge of the Most Holy, and, making use of my *shortcuts for the poor in spirit*, reach straight for more substantial food and more reliable guidelines.

I do not doubt that while doing that, he will manage to notice serious discrepancies between the *standard* dominating the market – or rather the stereotype of Christian ministry, and the norm by which I stand with such mulishness – not because I'm a mule, but because, in my humble opinion, it serves the glory of the Eternal One much better.

Although I did what I could so that the Reader wouldn't succeed in reconciling these discrepancies, that's where my ingeniousness ends – along with the competences and authorizations belonging to it. It is the Reader's task to choose the way he is following, so even though it befits him to make use of my *facilities for the disabled*, the turn towards the right altar – like the appeal made to the court against the judgment passed on him – should be his personal effort, unaffected by my whims.

This publication should be treated a little like a map, a tuning fork, a litmus paper or another simple and handy mold or detector – it is to serve the absolute orientation of the Reader in the complex space, full of dangerous illusions and useless trash, of the contemporary competition for the title to boast before the Judge of Israel. For reasons of principle, I'm dragging at the tail end of this weird race – the Reader who knows the Old and New Testament¹ can't hold a great grudge against me for that.

¹ Mark 9:33-37

The contract between the publisher and the author of the English translation determines the limit of financial benefits on account of the distribution of this edition until the time of death of the representatives of both its parties. After that term, in accordance with my wish, all the versions of the edition, including the paper version, are to have the status of a free publication. Thus, if anyone would like to let its laborers earn some money, wanting to remain consistent with the respectable *jure caduco*, he shouldn't hesitate to buy it and inform others of the publication of this exclusive volume.

The translation has so far lacked the solid editorial support that usually accompanies the translator's workshop and conscience. The Reader should be aware of that. Likewise, he should also understand that the attempts at obtaining an appropriate trade warranty had to, in case of this volume, encounter very real and quite substantial obstacles despite the dedication of significant funds for the editorial remuneration – and it isn't only because the distinctions of the publication objectively represent a quite big intellectual challenge.

The best editor is the Reader – in line with this hidden truth I would thus like to place an advert here for the honest purchasers of the book who would be able and willing to serve its linguistic shapes. I am far from expecting miracles from the candidate – I only expect him to be a master of his trade, a guardian of good manners and – this really isn't very challenging – to be able to bargain with me.

Paweł Zelwan

Kaletnik, April 23rd, 2016

FOREWORD

Working on this book was more like the work of an editor than an author – its content is not as much the fruit of creation as of putting things in order. I would like the Reader to think of it exactly like that, because this truth will help him understand the author's intentions. The canvas of the compilation is a collection of draft essays written in the late nineties, the aim of which was to introduce my onetime dear and near ones to the discoveries – difficult to accept to me as well – of the inaccuracies in the circulating interpretation of important Scripture texts.

In its current shape, the collection is to serve the consciences of the faithful who remain under the pressure of a false judgment over the gospel testimony of truth; it is to help them to purify themselves before God, pointing out at the same time that they think wrongly about Him and don't act according to his will, because they are underhandedly directed by a mind hostile to God, turning their attention away from the priorities of the Galilean. It is, therefore, a kind of a gateway for the prisoners of convictions incompatible with the truth.

This aim will be questioned as incredible – more or less directly (and for sure it will be belittled) – so it is better for the Reader to discover my open intentions on this page, rather than be forced to base his conviction in that matter exclusively on his own or someone else's conjectures.

The character of the collection is one of a protocol of hard intellectual work. That is why the Reader shouldn't try to value its fruit contained herein higher than the labor of a not-so-well fed and mistreated slave, who, in the hard fight for survival – in which he very often stood between a rock and a hard place – didn't manage to transfer into human language what he saw, heard and understood, sufficiently well. I'm not writing this to justify my shortcomings, but only in order to supply the Reader with a measure of mercy for the judgment of my extravagances, more or less forced upon me by life circumstances. He is the one who needs such a measure – not me.

This is a book for those who, for many non-trivial reasons, can't voice the defense of their mixed, but strong hunches that Christianity isn't in

excess of truth and that this destitution serves the glory of the Kingdom worse than a carrion serves a wake of vultures. My task is only to ensure them that they are not mistaken in their feelings and shouldn't depart from their right minds to improve their ratings on the grace exchange.

Resorting to prison slang, I would induce these attentive witnesses, reserved in their judgments, to look at today's teaching of the way of the Lord as on well-known shady dealings of identity thieves, whose greed matches their blindness, and, in turn, on my own access – as on a lingering roar of a camel in the desert, behind which there can't be anything more attractive than an ordinary well that it found. This last thing may fail to encourage malcontents, but it can render good service to many a dry throat and many a head that hasn't yet grown accustomed to the silence of the Almighty.

Nowadays, youth at schools and universities have to learn about the genesis of the cosmos, the formation of continents and the origin of species through the lens of the evolutionist ideology, even though blatant evidence testifying against it is considered by the most prominent authorities in almost every experimental field of science.

However, the demand for this fiction, flattering to humankind, is too great for the children to have a right to doubt the power of its all-powerful domain at the dawn of their short lives.

I won't support their lot with my testimony – not because I'm not one of the many scholars who rightly think that the theory of evolution is a load of heavy crap and a string of distasteful affairs, suspecting in its charm spiritual dangers for the believers in the redemptive power of the Creator, but because I consider the common hypocritical obsequiousness towards it a result of much more far-sighted and much more ingenious calculations than the calculations of outstanding scholars. That is why, in agreement with common sense, with the intention of improving spiritual health, I would prescribe my neighbors a *change of diet* preceded by a rigorous fast rather than the *aspirin pill* recommended by the scholars.

For like the children in state-run schools, who – for their parents' money – learn to believe in lies about the world around them and love those lies more than the life that this world contains, Christians also encounter the inglorious privilege of paying for lies about the Savior of this world, which promote their self-satisfaction, but they neither train minds nor

toughen the will. Both the small and the great ones are flocking in to this privilege – some for small, other for big benefits – all the while thinking immodestly that they are serving and worshipping the true image of the Revealer.

It may be of little importance to you, Reader, whether the world emerged *in the blink of a great eye*, or was forming for hundreds of millions, or even billions of years, or whether the layers of sedimentary rock in the whole world constitute a fossil record of a tremendous, short catastrophe, or centuries-old natural process. If at school you didn't apply yourself to learning too much, or you had a lousy teacher, ignorance in that matter won't burden your conscience.

However, if you confess faith in the true, one God, you may have a big problem with answering a much simpler, but more grave question than the above, which you will one day be asked by the Righteous One. Remaining in accordance with the greatest law on this earth, I wish you that upon finishing the reading of my strange book you will be able to avoid both this problem and the associated inescapable confusion over the verdict of the Judge of Israel.

When editing the content entrusted to my care, which was objectively hard to put into comprehensible words, I decided to overstep the rules of otherwise reasonable typographic conventions. Hence the Reader will find in this book much more marks of emphasis than it is usually the case in literary publications.

Let the following explanation serve his orientation in its roles: I attempted to use *italics* for quotations only, whereas I reserved the *oblique font* to mark irony or purely conventional, working approximations of oftentimes very complex spiritual phenomena. A special, literal emphasis is marked with a sparse print.

This endeavor seemed purposeful to me in view of the requirement for a direct, more flexible presentation of my standpoint, and also in view of the need to *reduce my own costs*, which the readers rarely have before their eyes. The language of faith is nowadays appropriated by the all-powerful media and in order not to become one of the thousands of heads *talking in the name of the Lord* I had to make the message a little indigestible to the lovers of pseudo-godly rants.

It is not my fault that the world doesn't know the truth about its Savior. I am only to voice the defense of my own conviction and take care so that this testimony is worthy of great faith, and not great money.

I have placed remarks typical of the workshop under some of the lectures, calling them *expositions*. There the Reader can find broader references and discursive explanations shedding light on the sources of doubts which arose during an attentive reading of the taught fragments, along with significant revelations and tracks of invigorating thoughts that helped me in *cracking the source code*.

The stories themselves are cautious attempts at approaching the mysteries of faith. Most of the time they just mark the critical points relevant to the internal logic of the instruction, making use of images that aren't too sophisticated. I dedicate them to the ones better and more gifted than me in the intention of directing them to the traces of the art of fighting for survival – unknown today – of which I myself feel more like an apprentice than a teacher. Waking the alertness of their minds will be my sole trophy – truly martial indeed.

The considerable amount of footnotes is to help the Reader to find the sources of direct references to the text of the Bible, sparing him at the same time unnecessary riddles. Minimal familiarity with the gospel message, Old Testament law and the prophets will also shorten the time of *readers' pains* significantly.

Of course I know that my terms and definitions are not exactly clear. However, if the Reader also knows how hard it sometimes is to say plainly what faith, love, wisdom and suffering is – especially if someone brushed against the boundaries of the world available to human senses – I think he will forgive the author's poverty, taking from it only what's best.

I don't insist that I'm worthy of the Readers' gratitude or liking. What I do insist on is only that the content of this book is news more valuable to the Reader than my reputation. So if a rough estimate of the latter won't be too low in his eyes, I count upon it that he won't discredit the slightly costly mulishness with which I, an indocile beast, was told to speak in a human voice.

Pawel Zelwan

Kaletnik, November 16th, 2011

MOTTO

Wretched and low is the man
who has to do what he was ordered.
Great and rich is the one who can do
what was timely submitted to his sober attention
and moderate concern for daily bread.
Unworthy of life and honor are all those
who cover the tracks of great guides
and grind the toil of the little ones to the dust of the earth.

Now it came about when all the kings who were beyond the Jordan, in the hill country and in the lowland and on all the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, heard of it, that they gathered themselves together with one accord to fight with Joshua and with Israel. When the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they also acted craftily and set out as envoys, and took worn-out sacks on their donkeys, and wineskins worn-out and torn and mended, and worn-out and patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and had become crumbled. They went to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us." The men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you are living within our land; how then shall we make a covenant with you?" But they said to Joshua, "We are your servants." Then Joshua said to them, "Who are you and where do you come from?" They said to him, "Your servants have come from a very far country because of the fame of the Lord your God; for we have heard the report of Him and all that He did in Egypt, and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon and to Og king of Bashan who was at Ashtaroath. So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, «Take provisions in your hand for the journey, and go to meet them and say to them, 'We are your servants; now then, make a covenant with us.'» This our bread was warm when we took it for our provisions out of our houses on the day that we left to come to you; but now behold, it is dry and has become crumbled. These wineskins which we filled were new, and behold, they are torn; and these our clothes and our sandals are worn out because of the very long journey." So the men of Israel took some of their provisions, and did not ask for the counsel of the Lord. Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore an oath to them. It came about at the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they were neighbors and that they were living within their land.

THE RAGAMUFFINS FROM GIBEON

The first victories of the Israelites on the other bank of the Jordan made a big impression on the inhabitants of the Promised Land. The kings of this land came to a seemingly very reasonable conclusion that only together could they stand up to the utterly bewildering onrush of invaders¹. Only the inhabitants of Gibeon deemed a completely different strategy reasonable².

In the city where – as Scripture points out³ – all the men were warriors, victory was valued over independence. Also the lives of the people turned out to be worth more than the status of sovereign princes among those who ruled over them. The elders, along with the inhabitants, consciously abandoned the treaties with their allies, giving themselves into the hands wielding the thing which was considered by them as the greatest: the promise of the Lord of heaven and earth.

What was it that they saw, those descendants of Ham, cursed by Noah? What stirred in them, that they did something so contrary to their nature and customs? That, instead of standing manfully in battle against the Israelites together with their brothers in arms, they went as far as to play such an artless trick – only in order to get a scrap of grace thrown from the hands of their equals. How did it come to their minds that those whom they outwitted wouldn't turn against them when they discovered their shameless deception?

The warrior who wears an armor and bears a heavy weapon all his life has to have a very clear reason to go to battle wearing rags. The host of the Gibeonites did it as one, without a murmur, having by this one deed crept into the favor of small people and a great God.

The Bible doesn't skip us on data in regard to what made the despised ones the partakers of the promise. There is no doubt that the in-

¹ Joshua 9:1-2

² Joshua 9:3-6

³ Joshua 10:1-4

spiration for the greatest martial feat in the lives of the Gibeonites were the last clashes of the Israelites with two strongholds: Jericho¹ and Ai².

Besides, it's enough to look at the map to make sure that the Hivites inhabiting Gibeon – because that's who we're talking about – didn't have to make a big effort to enquire about these extraordinary events. It all happened almost in their own backyard. So they saw two important things: the faith and endurance of the conquerors of Jericho and the crafty, even though childish simple, trick of the Israelites with which they outwitted the inhabitants of Ai with a similar result³.

The Gibeonites were scared – just like any normal, decent man would be today if a cold barrel of a gun was put to his temple. It wasn't the fear, though, that marked them out in God's eyes, but the fact that they looked and listened attentively, and what they heard appealed to their reason . . .

After all, they knew how to take care of their business, where and how to look for spoil and that every loot in someone else's town has to be ransomed with blood. They could be as steadfast as any good warrior who knows that the siege always lasts only as short – but also as long – as one of the sides doesn't give in.

When the walls of Jericho collapsed, and the people of Israel stepped in without obstacles and slaughtered everything that moved⁴, something also had to collapse to these true warriors, something that – as far as they could remember – was to them as obvious as the fact that after night comes day.

So far, if they submitted to a defeat in battle, they were supported by a natural conviction that, if they healed their wounds, heaped supplies, returned in greater numbers or had the sun behind their backs, they would not only avoid the losses that they had suffered this time (which they preferred to forget fast), but they would recoup them twofold – if not on those who turned out to be stronger this time, then on the weaker ones, who can always be found.

The event in Jericho completely shattered this certainty of theirs, so far uncontested. This testimony convinced them that, if such things happen, nothing is certain in this world and they can forget about their plans, desires and visions that they undoubtedly have been given as well. Within

¹ Joshua 6:1-27

² Joshua 7:1-26; 8

³ Joshua 8:3-22

⁴ Joshua 6:20-21

a stone's throw from them, life and prosperity have been extinguished like a candlelight. The holy God of Israel took care that what was obscure in the sight of the peoples, came to light on the judgment day.

Everything was conceivable to the Gibeonites, but not such a miracle and such ruthless bloodshed in a city where, at least at face value, no property has been touched. The elders may have remembered that fate had already brought them in contact with the descendants of Jacob once. It was in the town of Shechem, where two Israelite brothers took revenge for the defilement of their sister¹. But then their cool, calculated ruthlessness was motivated by an unsophisticated idea, and despite that, only men were killed. What is more, everything that could be lifted, including cattle, women and children, was taken. The sons of Jacob had no intention of judging the whole earth whatsoever.

And now everything is suggesting that. Fortified strongholds are falling one after another, and the conquerors not only don't bother to take advantage of the riches in Jericho, but they bring judgment down on their own compatriot who has been enticed by the valuables².

Even if the eyes of the Gibeonite scouts haven't seen the stoning of the Israelite desecrator, the inhabitants of Gibeon understand that what is coming – even though inconceivable – will also come upon them and be fulfilled like with Jericho. For the Israelites won't be stopped by any treaties or the power of united kingdoms, since they aren't only about the goods for which people usually conquer towns. Since among them there is a God who demands the law as relentlessly as none of the other gods that the Gibeonites served.

Still, other nations were also terrified by those events. And the Hivites obtained favor not because they were more scared than the others, but because they heard something that we would nowadays call the *gospel*. They understood that only a word given to them by the Israelites could protect them from the wrath to come. And what strengthened them in that conviction was the faithfulness of the chosen nation, the obedience to the law that ordered them to do on the earth things that no man would even think of.

¹ Genesis 34:1-31

² Joshua 7:8-26

If they execute the law in such a way – thought the Hivites – then not only is it clear that God himself promised them this land and is starting to fulfill his promise. It is also clear, or at least very probable, that these people will also keep their word if they decide to spare us. In any case, submission seemed more certain than fighting – not because they trusted the Israelites, but because they recognized that they could rely on the evident power and faithfulness of the God who was leading the chosen nation. Today we would say that they simply *believed*.

To render the faith *effective*, that means, to save their own lives, there remained for them to take the promise, which apparently applied not only to Hebrews, but to everyone who followed into the footsteps of their fathers' faith. We don't have to think that the Gibeonites were in the midst of the assembly in which, after the battle of Ai, Joshua reminded his people the law of Moses¹ – by their words and actions they proved that they knew what they had to know to escape execution.

For they learned not only about everything that had happened in Egypt and the victories over the Amorites, of what they eagerly inform Joshua². They have also heard about things that they don't mention to him: that the law of Moses was to be the same both for the stewards of God's judgments and the strangers³.

They know that they don't stand a slightest chance of obtaining the covenant if they present themselves as locals. Because even if they earnestly argue that they mean no harm, they won't be heard anyway, for the unrelenting letter of God's law ruled a curse on the peoples from the lands of the inheritance promised to the Israelites⁴. But even the law left hope for those who sought justification, and, contrary to God's elect, didn't care as much for their own name, as for their life, which only in God endows the name with an imperishable value.

The Gibeonites took hold of this word with might and main – the word that commanded the Israelite to love the stranger as himself in remembrance of their own slavery in Egypt... But still, they lived close by! They weren't strangers to them. They belonged to one of the tribes that Joshua was to exterminate.

¹ Joshua 8:30-35

² Joshua 9:9-10

³ Leviticus 19:33-34

⁴ Deuteronomy 7:1-11

It wouldn't be reasonable to count upon the Israelites to not indulge in their lusts, only just bound by the law, and that exactly in the situation in which this law substantiated killing without a twinge of conscience. The Gibeonites didn't lose head thinking of rescue. It's hard to escape the impression that God himself inspired them, when they heard about the trick with which Joshua and his army outwitted the inhabitants of Ai.

The Gibeonites were terrified by God, not by people. They noticed that, in order to win with Ai – to have their way – the Israelites had to pull off a masquerade. They had to pretend that the previous defeat, in which thirty six men had died¹, weakened their warlike spirit considerably². Only in this way were they able to lull the king of Ai, who was always eager to crush the enemies in retreat. Nowadays, weaklings and cowards can expect from their enemies often too eager reactions of pity and compassion, but back then they could only count on an equally eager scorn and sword.

The appearance of the previously beaten Israelites before the city and their faked flight at the sight of the armies leaving the gates awakened in the inhabitants of Ai exactly this normal, human lust, to the degree that the elementary precautions were abandoned and all the people were called together to pursue the runaways³. After all, one doesn't rout the Israelite force every day, and such a great, easy victory would knit together with patriotic pride those who suddenly felt powerful together.

The Bible explicitly declares how great a commotion and bloodthirsty frenzy was caused by Joshua's trick, inspired by God himself. Not only in Ai, but also in the neighboring Bethel, not a single man was left who had not gone out after Israel, and they left the city gates open. Nobody suspected that behind the city, hidden, waiting for a sign from Joshua, was a troop of Israelites whose task was now to invade the suddenly deserted city⁴.

The hearts of the inhabitants of Ai, blinded by their own lust, grew faint when they saw that behind their backs everything they'd owned is going up in smoke. The past runaways easily took advantage of the weakness of the opponents, real this time, backed up from the other side

¹ Joshua 7:4-5

² Joshua 8:3-7

³ Joshua 8:13-17

⁴ Joshua 8:18-23

by the host that had just destroyed the fortified city – the lofty refuge of their little faith.

The event described in chapter eight remains in the immediate vicinity of a feat equally extraordinary as Joshua's design. The sober-minded Gideonites, imitating the tactic of the sons of Israel against themselves, displayed a conviction that's reasonable in God's eyes: that, firstly, the Israelites are also torn by lusts, and secondly, that the Most High God will forgive even the most scandalous fraud in the eyes of men, if He sees faith looking for shelter only in himself.

By that they grasped the spirit of Moses' commandments, in which, like in a lofty stronghold, the descendants of Jacob entrenched themselves, too distrustful and too naïve to fulfill the holy law of God, who is love. For the cowardliness and timidity of God's elect, satisfying their lusts, would order them to slaughter each and every one who came to ask for mercy, only because they inhabited the land given to them. But God revealed his glory, making it known also to us today, that the executors of the law had no idea why it was given, and it weren't those taking possession of the holy land who grasped its meaning, but those who were striving for their lives in this land.

When the procession of the ragamuffins from Gibeon declares to Joshua and the elders of Israel that they are a long way away from the place from which they came, they glance at them with distrust, as from behind the walls of a bolted stronghold, from which the king of Ai, enticed by easy triumph, has just spotted Joshua's troop. From the Israelite mouth a final, but tenuous argument of their objection is issued:

*"Perhaps you are living within our land;
how then shall we make a covenant with you?"*

But the Gibeonites answer Joshua firmly, knowing that they will hit the raw nerve of their pride:

"We are your servants."

Somebody who purports to be a servant is worth examining if he is not lying. A servant will always come in useful if he is faithful. Joshua remembered the rebellion of the princes in the desert camp very well¹. He

¹ Numbers 16:1-35

knew that even now the pride of the prominent ones was only dimmed by the time of war and that he would yet have to face it, like Moses, many times. The privilege of service is sometimes too little for the applause-hungry.

Then Joshua said to them, "Who are you and where do you come from?"

The Gibeonites needed no signal to present themselves to the eyes of the conquerors as footsore pilgrims coming from afar to the sounds of the glory of the Israelite God¹. The Israelites, used to the haughty words of their enemies, lost head, exactly like the inhabitants of Ai, who saw the yesterday's invaders running away from them. And just like the ones from the city, they came out of their stronghold of holy commandments.

They based their rash verdict on what their eyes saw, their ears heard, and – as we would say nowadays – on the tune to which their hearts beat. And there was one tune: that the humble ones will always be of some use or another. The Gibeonites must have trembled at the thought that it could enter somebody's head to ask the Lord's oracle, but God, seeing the faith of the ragamuffins, blinded even Joshua, so that they would, contrary to the will of the elect, obtain the eternal covenant. So that what was promised would be given based on faith to those who believe.

It is obvious that the fraud had to come to light, to the indignation of the people, who, as always in such moments, and even now, turned against the established authorities, rightly reproaching the leaders for having been deceived like babies. But the right of the majority even nowadays rarely equals God's right. So, also back then the authority given to Joshua stopped the tumult of the mob that flew into holy rage when their holy will was crossed, ready to stone those to whom God himself showed mercy in his indefatigable grace². But even to Joshua it was hard to grasp how one could lie so shamelessly.

*Then Joshua called for them and spoke to them, saying,
"Why have you deceived us, saying, «We are very far from you,»
when you are living within our land?*

*Now therefore, you are cursed, and you shall never cease being slaves,
both hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God."*³

¹ Joshua 9:9-14

² Joshua 9:15-21

³ Joshua 9:22-27

Even he himself didn't understand that this false testimony, judged by the law as a sin¹, wasn't directed against the Israelites. It was directed by God, though, against the pride of the Israelites, so that they would learn to bless everyone who comes in the name of the Lord. This lesson took a long time – in fact, it lasts until today. The Israelites jealously guarded the holy books, even though they murdered the prophets. Likewise, to Jesus' followers it wasn't obvious for a long time that the greatest one in the Kingdom is the one who humbles himself.

So if Joshua, while keeping his word to them, punished the Gibeonites with what he considered the hardest and most inglorious ministry, he didn't prove his own magnanimity, but the power and love of his God, who, for his own sake, taught his servant to weigh the words spoken in his name.

The One God fulfilled his work on the cross of Golgotha, elevating Him who, in the eyes of many, turned out – like the Gibeonites – to be a transgressor of the law. By taking a human form, he still humbled himself more than they did, because no deceit was found in his mouth. Through faith He gave us the right to become his children and grow in the spirit of sanctification into the knowledge of the Son, who is in the Father. He also gives power, so that those who acknowledged the blood-bought gift of life and grace would be able to take up the burden that is too much for them – and that with confidence. He himself knows best what Joshua already sensed: that the water carrier has to be able to keep his balance, and the woodcutter has to strike cleanly with his blade, and, what is more, each of them has to have a strong spine, nerves of steel and his feet on the ground.

In the epoch when water and firewood are less and less often carried with human hands, these hardest ministries in the house of the living God are performed with joy and willingness by those who have been forgiven much. For they know that it's the power of the Lord active in them that prevents the thirsty from fainting at the threshold of the tabernacle, and, instead of festive, somewhat risky fireworks of religious ecstasy, the place of assembly is filled with faith working through love, which expects no reward.

¹ Exodus 20:16

The Gibeonites, our brothers in faith, recognized that the shrewdness of a snake and the tender-heartedness of a dove will equip everyone with what is pleasing to our Lord. He himself is our portion and our glory and from his hands those will be rewarded who – like the descendants of Ham – accept the Lord's yoke with thankfulness for the grace shown to them from above. A donkey will surely overtake a neighing stallion which flees at the rustle of dried grass. Sometimes the donkey gets scared as well, and even a flogging won't move it, but it only happens when the angel of the Lord stands in its way¹. May the Lord always stand behind us, even on our backs, anything but against us. For unmerited esteem sometimes pleasantly strokes us too, like it did the Israelites.

Jacob obtained a blessing dressed as his brother, whom Isaac loved because (with the major help of his mother) he was able to please his father's palate². We have also been received by the heavenly Father – and He will uphold us if we have truly put on Christ, whom through faith we call brother. Our Father isn't blind like Isaac, who had to touch and smell the dressed-up Jacob before finally taking him for his firstborn. The Eternal One knows his Firstborn a sight better, because He is in Him. He won't be deceived by any tricks or advances. And we also won't be deceived by devilish tricks, but only if we persevere in our hope, which is Christ in us.

The wedding clothes that we have put on are worth something. They aren't goatskins or even the most beautiful attire of a hunter who lives off his own capture, but white garments of righteousness. Not our righteousness, but that of the Lord Jesus. Their real price is known only to God, who forsook his Son when He was fulfilling the Father's holy law on the cross. We can show our Father that we know the worth of his sacrifice in only one way: by thankfully seeking for the wreath for the price of our human abasement, which – apart from God – is known only to us.

Therefore, let's not be surprised if God forsakes us too in times of trial. He is teaching us – the ragamuffins from Gibeon – to walk, in order to be able to elevate us and be proud of his children, like every father. So if the devil tempts us into showing to our neighbor the tag with the price of our renunciations, let's not threaten him with our little cross. That's what

¹ Numbers 22:21-34

² Genesis 27:6-29

the children who think they are grown-ups do. Satan isn't impressed by our ardent promises, evidence and gestures for show. Let's rather look at Jesus, at the snake elevated on a pole, at his cross and the price of his renunciation, and let's make a step on the way that is truth and life. Liabilities and debts will be judged by the Lord of the living and the dead.



*Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.
So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer
in the place where He was. Then after this He said to the disciples,
“Let us go to Judea again.” [...]
Now Jesus had not yet come into the village,
but was still in the place where Martha met Him.
Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her,
when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out,
they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.
Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him,
and fell at His feet, saying to Him,
“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”
When Jesus therefore saw her weeping,
and the Jews who came with her also weeping,
He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, and said,
“Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.”
Jesus wept. So the Jews were saying, “See how He loved him!”
But some of them said, “Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man,
have kept this man also from dying?”
So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb.
Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.
Jesus said, “Remove the stone.” Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him,
“Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.”
Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you believe,
you will see the glory of God?” So they removed the stone.
Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said,
“Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.
I knew that You always hear Me;
but because of the people standing around I said it,
so that they may believe that You sent Me.”*

UNDERTAKERS AND THIEVES OF GRACE

A long time ago, a certain old fisherman wrote a story about a man whom he knew, worshipped and loved. This man considered himself to be God. At every turn He tried to present to the attention of his disciples and everyone who listened to Him this most momentous fact in the bloody history of the world. In his lifetime He didn't convince anyone, even his faithful followers. Not until the moment of his death was the veil for human eyes torn apart, so that those who didn't see his earthly form could also believe in Him.

John talks about himself only reluctantly. He describes the events in which he took part somewhat like from a bird's-eye view. There are few words which say explicitly what he was sure of. All of them, however, testify of what he believed in, and the power of his testimony convinces even the toughest rebels, because they were written down by a rebel and disbeliever himself – the same one who, while clinging to his Master's bosom¹, simultaneously wished to see the destruction of a Samaritan village happen².

He was probably the first of the converts: at the empty tomb of the Messiah³ he certainly must have remembered another tomb and a miraculous resurrection, and, above all, he must have finally grasped what it was that caused tears to run down the cheeks of the powerful King at the tomb of Lazarus⁴.

Only John grasped the significance of the event in Bethany⁵. No other disciple mentions it. Only he, he who had seen and touched the body worshipped by the little ones, could become small himself and by that very act believe when it disappeared, and, years later, testify to all those of little faith that this word that he heard became the flesh that he saw.

John isn't much concerned with metaphors and pictures. He isn't trying (like many nowadays do) to change other people's thoughts but striv-

¹ John 13:21-26

² Luke 9:51-56

³ John 20:1-9

⁴ John 11:35

⁵ John 11:1-45

ing with all his might to serve those who don't entirely trust in their own thoughts. His coverage of the events in Bethany resembles a geyser situated close to a volcano – seemingly powerful and evoking devout fear – whereas from close-up it turns out to be a spring of fresh water for the thirsty. Because only an attentive reading of his words allows to forget the prophetic miracle of resurrection for a moment, so that the Miracle Worker manifests himself in them – He who was to be resurrected himself, so that mere earthly mortals would never again strike terror¹.

The Galilean is in no hurry on hearing of his friend's sickness². His disciples might be the last to think that God is swifter and more effective than a hunting falcon. Therefore it doesn't even come to their minds that death could touch somebody like Lazarus³, and that on the very eve of the deliverance of the Israelites which they were awaiting⁴.

What is more, no thought could be more alien to them than the thought that their Messiah is preparing for his passion⁵. They acknowledge his authority and wield his power, ask their Teacher and show obedience to their Commander. They believe that this is *the man that was to come*. But He is important to them only because He *finally came to them*, and not because He always was.

Each of them acts like Philip and Andrew, who, having met Jesus, announced to their near and dear ones: "*We have found the Messiah*."⁶ They still think that the fact that they've been chosen as the apostles of the Son of God is owing to their inherent prudence and good will. They're still convinced that they are his debtors in everything except for their lives. Hence their zeal, but also fear – the fear that makes Thomas show solidarity with Lazarus' fate:

*"Let us also go, so that we may die with him."*⁷

Martha's reproach is the next blow to the man of mercy:

¹ Psalms 10:12-18

² John 11:6

³ John 11:10-15

⁴ John 14:18-22

The disciples adjust their expectations of the Teacher to the untrue image of his ministry which they have before their eyes. So far, in this image there is no place for the thought that the Master is consistently heading for the goal that He had been appointed and that this goal

is approaching Him at a rate that is dizzying to the disciples' reckonings. I infer the utter surprise of the disciples upon Lazarus' death and their conviction of the paresis (lack of efficacy) of the messianic prerogatives in that matter from the words of Thomas, quoted with pious intention (author's note).

⁵ Mark 9:30-32

⁶ John 1:35-46

⁷ John 11:16

*"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.
Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."*¹

This positive confession of the Jewess, who is tempted by lusts before our very eyes, rang in John's ears. This provident woman, dear to our hearts, is sincere in her human grief towards somebody who, to her, is only a teacher and miracle-worker. *Jesus is late: it's disgraceful and unforgivable, but she, a noble woman, despite his negligence and gross sluggishness, will stick with Him and stay faithful. After all, what wouldn't you do for the Messiah, even when He doesn't do that well.*

We would like to justify her, explain that she got it wrong and it's not her fault. But this wish is a hypocritical one. There's no reason for us to relieve God and defend her in front of the court, as if we were afraid of it ourselves. It is, after all, a very common sin, and John preserves for us this conversation of a woman with the incarnate God precisely so that we would know what He's forgiven us as well. Let's hear the rest of the dialogue:

*Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him,
"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."
Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life;
he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,
and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.
Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord;
I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God,
even He who comes into the world."
When she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister,
saying secretly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you."*

Martha remembers her creed perfectly, even though she doesn't understand why the Teacher seems to remind her of who He is in such an inappropriate moment. *He didn't make it in time, that's clear. But she still forgave Him.* Only his gravity and authority keep her for another moment, and all Jesus gets is Martha's vexed assurance that *she knows who she's talking to and that He is the one who was supposed to come to the world.*

¹ John 11:20-22

Now, however, she doesn't need Him anymore – unlike her aching sister, for whom she cares somewhat like for the slightly more expensive household appliances, which she would like to be clean, shiny and fit for use. Martha has one more commission for God – like every woman who lost sight of the image of a real man.

This original of man is standing in front of her and He doesn't leave any doubt that He knows what He came for and what He's talking about. But a veil of flesh and blood covers her eyes and the only thing that she's able to desire is that *this Christ* – or whatever He's called – *wouldn't waste his precious time and join the Jews comforting Mary after the loss of her brother*. Like all the rest of them, Martha doesn't believe that it's the Lord of the living and the dead speaking to her. She is the one to say that the stench of the corpse shouldn't needlessly irritate the Lord's nostrils¹.

John adds one more indication confirming the argument that the reasons for Jesus' pain were very real by testifying of Martha's confusion. She delivers her sister an alleged directive of the Master, which in fact never left his mouth². Martha, who apparently didn't understand why Jesus was talking to her like that, hid behind Maria, remembering better than John that her sister *had a better spiritual contact with the great man*³.

What happens next is a stumbling block to people until the present day: God is surprised (He's shaken and disturbed⁴) – and what astonishes Him and makes Him talk to Martha at all is the unbelief of his good acquaintance.

Until the prayer in the garden of Gethsemane⁵, there is in Him still a glimmer of hope of body and soul that his own death won't be necessary, that the people whom He came to save will recognize Him as God not only with their lips, but also with their hearts. And this powerful knowledge and love of the Creator, clothed in a human form, bend down in wonder that man, by himself, puts idols before the living God, because he doesn't want to experience the delights and concerns of redeeming

¹ John 11:38-40

² John 11:27-28

³ Luke 10:38-42

⁴ John 11:33-34

Such meanings, contrary to the suggestions of most translators, are here supported by the original (author's note).

⁵ Luke 22:39-44

grace. He prefers unattainable law and duties to crumbs from the Lord's table – and to joy in each of the tribulations that it is all that has come upon him.

For another moment, before the arrival of Mary with her comforters, who are sobbing with her, Jesus hopes to see somebody's trust and a head lifted up in faith. But nothing like that happens. This time even the ones that are closest to the deceased aren't crying: *"Son of David, have mercy on him!"*

and [He] said, "Where have you laid him?"

They said to Him, "Lord, come and see."

But Jesus doesn't want to see the deceased – He wants to bring him back to life.

Can there be anything more painful to our Lord than that – when, instead of the Giver of Life, his little brothers and sisters see in Him a belated confessor, who came to share with them their grief and fear? This time there was to be no wailing of mourners – there was to be a miracle. Let us not think that God resurrects on call. But then, in Bethany, nobody believed in what the Originator and Perfecter of our faith was saying.

Had they known what He had earlier disclosed to the disciples, Lazarus' sisters would be scandalized by the supposed heartlessness of the Teacher:

"Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes

*that I was not there, so that you may believe."*¹

And the disciples weren't outraged by these words only because the friend lying in the tomb wasn't their brother. That's neighborly love – to the grave, but not any further.

Sentimental affairs, tragic images of others' dilemmas and small, futile hopes occupy our heads and bodies that have been created for grace. That's why it's hard for us to treat seriously the testimony of John, which says that Jesus cried at Lazarus' tomb not because He was a man, but precisely because He is God.

¹ John 11:14-15

Yet the real cause of the Master's pain is so much different from the generally presumed one that it is being unwittingly erased from the dictionary of faith by all translators and exegetes, for it offends them like the sight of a wound for which there is no cure.

If the cause of the Master's tears would indeed be human tears and suffering, we would have no explanation whatsoever as to why in all the places where Jesus has pity for the people there is no mention of his tears. Also the scene from the way of the cross, when Jesus admonishes the women that are wailing for Him¹ would be strange and incomprehensible – why, it would be becoming for the Master to be moved to tears by this display of human compassion and solidarity with his fate, which He allegedly longed for.

We would also have to impute cruelty and injustice to God, having before our eyes the images of human anguish, which, on the day of judgment, will be joined by gnashing of teeth, and they won't reach the throne of grace together anyway².

Our Lord – if we're judging Him by our measure – would act very reasonably if He fell apart in front of the Jewish Council, Pilate, or at least at the place of execution. Maybe He wouldn't have avoided the cross, but at least He wouldn't be so troublesome to us – because, like we absolve ourselves of weaknesses and sins of the flesh, we could also finally absolve Him as well in our little consciences, to which tears are still only the sign of the weakness of the human flesh, and never of the greatness of the spirit of God.

But calculation and fear of the final separation aren't His traits, but ours – Jacob's descendants'. They are but a pale image of the fullness, bestowed miraculously on the earthly body of Christ, who, like a serpent, slipped out of everyone's grasp, and was afraid only of sin, which He didn't know. It's good that we are afraid and that we can count. If it weren't so, we would neither be able to assess the price that was paid for us, nor to experience comfort and support in the fact that the Son of Man wasn't afraid of what we're afraid of.

The perspective of dying on the cross scared Him only because to Him it meant the greatest and most painful of renunciations on this earth –

¹ Luke 23:27-31

25:26-30; Luke 13:25-30

² Matthew 8:10-12; 13:40-43; 22:11-14;

separation from the Father. For, according to the Scripture, the Father had forsaken the Crucified One so that those who value trustworthy promises would believe that the Spirit of the Lord won't forsake them even to the end of the age, when they will see the Righteous One.

The perplexity and pain of the Savior at Lazarus' tomb can be fully explained only by his one weakness – the weakness for the people whom He chose and loved, having deprived Himself of his due rights, which the sinners would grant Him only after his death.

Those people weren't able to understand that. They saw tears and only this testified in their eyes of that love, which they didn't know and didn't receive. Only the presence of the Messiah at the tomb moved some minds, even though their hearts remained of stone, unchanged. Those who undoubtedly had seen many a miracle were now expecting another one. Their disappointment and resentment is shown by the unearthly account of the eyewitness:

*Jesus wept. So the Jews were saying,
"See how He loved him!" But some of them said,
"Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man,
have kept this man also from dying?"*¹

These were decent people: caring, civil, sympathetic – just like most of us. They weren't snakes in the grass. But the people standing under the cross were also like us, not even particularly bloodthirsty or hungry for a spectacle. They simply came and watched an execution in the majesty of the law. Some of them thought a little like this: *"This man had to commit something if he's hanging there. It's impossible that he didn't commit any offence against the authorities, as they say."*

Others thought like this: *"maybe he didn't commit any wrong, but he was saying such weird things – something about the judgment, blood, bread – his brain must be addled. Maybe it's good that there are not many like him walking this earth. One has to obey the authorities and the priests. Such a one could even come to my home – I dread to think."*

¹ John 11:35-37

Only the soldiers, the principals and the criminal on the cross braved open mockery and ridicule. Their self-confidence and contempt for weakness have, by God's judgment, hidden the truth from them. I feel indebted to these professions. I like soldiers for not concealing their excessive drive towards women. I find likeable the principals who don't try to make an impression that the lust for power to which they yield is the noblest of impulses.

I know hardly any thugs, but I could take a liking to those – even out of jail – who don't pose as angels, or – even worse – as missionaries battling ignorance and social injustice. I agree a little with the widespread, however always too eager and vulgar judgment that officiousness is worse than fascism. Nevertheless, what is even more fatal is the Pharisaic hypocrisy. And that's what we should beware of.

* * *

It is God who is crying at the tomb of Lazarus. He isn't crying because He is weak like us, but because He is mighty. So mighty that He doesn't hide his acute and real pain. We see his greatness and virtue also in the fact that He never holds his tears against us and doesn't count them, even though He put our tears in his bottle¹. It is completely different than with children who cry to force their parents to concede to their will.

Even grown-ups succumb to these devilish whisperings, and, if they can't gain others' ears, they submit to all eyes the tag with the price of their own renunciation. Instead of showing the necessary obedience in an exemplary way, they expose themselves in front of those who, because of their gullibility, treat their wounds more seriously than their lusts. The most pretentious ones shamelessly celebrate their public passion, animating the work of the Holy Spirit, who is supposedly grieved by everybody except themselves.

Jesus was crying in Bethany because of the idolatrous blindness of the Jews, but He never made scenes for show, obediently waiting for his hour. The disciples noticed no tears on the face of the Messiah when their and our Lord was carrying the cross on which He was to die. Somebody who is used to guessing instead of listening attentively will always guess

¹ Psalm 56:8

too much and paint before our eyes a picture different from the one we know.

This painting will always depict roughly the same: the sadness and blood of the Savior in the same gilt frame. It will add to the words of the Scripture what isn't there, to add to the burdens, instead of removing them at the watering-place, and to demand ever new allegedly necessary sacrifices instead of mercy.

True Christians aren't too much concerned about the fact that somebody sacrificed his life for them, and even died for them. Even when they hear the name Jesus, they will hold their peace and wait for the joyful news of the resurrection. If the news doesn't come, to hell with the rest! They won't be much impressed by the bolts which don't come from the blue¹.

The lightnings will rather wake their compassion and a firm readiness to help those who had put their trust in a lie and idolized their small ambitions and plans. For they recognize that their brothers and sisters are bound by the ancient human fear of suffering and death of the body, which so many times, even in the history of the Church, turned the persecuted into persecutors, stewards of orthodox teaching into apostates, the wounded into the ones inflicting the wounds.

Even torturers often fail to break the captured prisoners who take war secrets down with them to the mass graves. Let us not think that the Son of God shed a single tear during his torment, at the same time assuring the criminal on the cross next to Him that He knows where He's going². This offends the holy image, like the unholy conviction of the Jews from Bethany that God is always grieving and rejoicing with them, for the same reasons as they do.

January 10th, 1998

¹ Ephesian 4:25-26

² Luke 23:33-43



Exposition

None of the Christian denominations will live to see a deeper spiritual awakening without revising the delusive conviction at the root of their faith, that John, when editing his report of the events in Bethany, saw the cause of Jesus' pain in a reaction of sympathy towards the fellows of the deceased who were gathered there. And that's because this idolatrous vision undermines the skill of apostolic authority in the judgment of the traits of the Master's profile that John had personally discovered, and gives the lie to his testimony, which is faithful to the truth.

It is quite difficult for a sane individual to accept this commonly held conviction, if he knows the words that John used to describe the state of mind of the Galilean. Hence the translators took great care so that these words wouldn't be read in the meaning intended by the Apostle. Therefore, in almost all the translations¹ we read that Jesus *was deeply moved in spirit and troubled*. This is done to present to our eyes exactly the same picture of tenderness to essential matters that we know so well – even though it doesn't fit the scenery painted by John's pen too well.

How very human is Jesus here – the exegetes stubbornly try to convince us, preferring not to encounter in their way the modest conviction that it is the deity of Jesus that John devoted his Gospel to², rightly assuming that the future generations will sooner run out of evidence for the originality of the shapes of his thoughts and will than for the fact that *He sometimes had very human inclinations and needs*.

The account of the events in Bethany is indeed such a *basic necessity* for those following into the footsteps of the Galilean, because it highlights a nerve of the messianic attention and his way of looking that hasn't

¹ NLT conveys the meaning of the word ΕΜΒΡΙΜΑΟΜΑΙ more accurately. Polish translations emphasise the positiveness of Jesus' feelings more clearly, whereas the English vocabulary is more neutral.

However, the term used by John has a clearly negative undertone, which seems to be ignored by both English and Polish commentaries (translator's note).

² John 20:30-31

been introduced anywhere else on earth, letting everyone grasp the hierarchy of goals and values of this mysterious, unearthly newcomer. Apparently, neither the translators of the manuscripts nor the teachers care much for that if they consider shackling common sense the shorter way to the godly purpose.

I would lift these shackles, even if only a little, because I myself received more from reasonable people than from ideologists and I know the difference between good advice and a good intention – it is not uncommon for the latter to be guilty of sizeable unrestraint, and, besides that, the concern for the peace of the human soul is often absent from the scope of its attention.

Therefore, let us assume that the Reader isn't a man who was once brought to blind rage by the carelessness of his darling, and that he isn't a woman who flew into a rage at her disobedient child – let's assume that he doesn't know what heartbreak is – as well as regret, anger or disappointment caused by the actions or words of the near and dear ones that are inconsistent with clearly communicated expectations.

Let's assume that he has just been born and has in front of himself only the Bible, Strong's concordance, some gumption and a strange impression that the translators are telling him to read of *sentiment* where he sees, like the nineteenth-century scholar, an angry snort, irritation, indignation, readiness to give a stern admonition¹, and of *affection* precisely where he sees deep trouble, perplexity, intense disappointment².

The first of these two words even seems to be reserved for the extraordinary circumstance of this testimony, since it occurs in no other place in the Scripture³. Its meaning, however, can be easily described as irritation with futile persuasions evoking the image of plowing the sand.

John uses a shade of the meaning of the second of the two words when he describes the state of mind of the Master foretelling Judas' betrayal⁴, when he draws up the farewell words of the Master telling the disciples *not to be troubled* because of his departure⁵, and even writing of the *stirring* of the water in the pool to which the wretch who has been

¹ gr. ΕΝΕΒΡΙΜΗΣΑΤΟ ΤΩ ΠΙΝΕΥΜΑΤΙ

² gr. ΕΤΑΡΑΞΕΝ

³ This isn't entirely true – it is also used

by Matthew and Mark (translator's note).

⁴ John 13:21

⁵ John 14:1

incapacitated by infirmity for thirty eight years could never make it in time¹! It is something entirely else than a *sentiment of the spirit* caused by compassion for the suffering of its neighbors.

Even if the Reader isn't someone tested in his adversities, which would mean that he's poor in the substance that is used to create comparisons and analogies with the experience of the Master, it won't be difficult for him to notice the absurdity of the commonly propagated cause for his behavior in the light of the meanings of the key words that he has discovered in the original – as compared to the cause that's called by its name by John, for which this faithful witness furnished us with simple reasons in the form of the sequence of events that, taken together, were hard to bear even for the Holy One.

My story is an unsophisticated fictionalization of these reasons, aiming at emphasizing their effect, which was traumatizing to the soul of the Master, culminating in the inspired message by the description of a burst of tears, which is always a sort of relief in the suffering that one is going through – to the small ones and the great alike.

A blubberer cries for any reason or out of fear – a great commander and warrior cries when the ones he is fighting for prefer the boozy meals at the enemy's rear. It's a fundamental difference; what connects them in the weak flesh is only the desire for relief.

In John's account, contrary to the appearances that were being created for ages, there is nothing strange or extraordinary – nothing that would demand of the Reader any mental acrobatics, the traces of the sense and goal of which are impossible to find in the Scripture. By no means: exact parallels with Jesus' state of mind in Bethany are provided by the rich prophetic prints which clearly and distinctly show the causes of the sadness and anger of the servants of the living God, not as in agreement with the intuition and calculations of their contemporaries, but in permanent and painfully intense conflict with them.

The paradox of the modern mendacity is that it denies John's testimony credibility as concerns the state of the thoughts and feelings of the Originator of faith, while simultaneously holding in careful esteem the Old Testament testimonies of very similar moments in the lives of

¹ John 5:7

those smaller than Him – because they weren't as offending as the Christ – people of great faith and great need to know the truth. It requires truly unearthly peace to look at this state of affairs without fear, especially that the passionate censorial arrogance that I point out is invariably accompanied by a very limited sense of humor and manners that could hardly be described as courtly.

Its proponents will do well to read on these pages the author's *wish of death*¹ before they meet with the fate that the Righteous One prepared for those who deserve it in their hypocrisy for entangling their neighbors in their own disgrace and apostasy.

December 18th, 2011

¹ Mark 9:42

Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

[...]

And He said, "A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, «Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.» So he divided his wealth between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.

Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. But when he came to his senses, he said, «How many of my fathers hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight;

I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'»

So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, «Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.»

But the father said to his slaves, «Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.»

And they began to celebrate. Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.

And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be.

And he said to him, «Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.» But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him.

But he answered and said to his father, «Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.»

And he said to him, «Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.»"

THE SWINEHERD

On his way to Jerusalem, the Messiah persistently resisted the idolatrous salutes to his acclaimed excellence. The Pharisees could afford to treat the Master to a meal and show a cautious interest in his views. They were flattered by the presence of the prominent Teacher, followed by multitudes wanting to hear another parable and see another miracle. Before they decided to kill Him, they had probably deliberated for a long time on how to convince Him to constructively cooperate in national liberation.

The power that He demonstrated and the time that He devoted to the needy could, in their view, be surely made better use of in the fight with the Roman occupier. According to them, however, Jesus didn't suffer the burden of good manners. This carpenter's son didn't much value the accolades and signs of good will of the rulers, who, after all, humbly endured his reprehensible quirks.

"Glutton and drunkard,"¹ is probably what the more understanding ones said. "After all, that's not such a big deal, but at least he could eat and drink with his equals²; he could have a little respect and care for his own dignity, and not for that of others."

Coveters always had a hard time bearing the presence of God's messengers. In the opinion of the Pharisees, however, a hellhound was only he who was making himself equal with God. For the thought that God could lower himself to the tax collectors and sinners³ and accept their service and hospitality⁴ was inconceivable and blasphemous to them. Jesus showed real patience, worthy of our attention, to these envious and mendacious priests daring to shove the law that He had established in his face. And his divine authority was acknowledged after his death precisely by those who, having experienced his presence, understood that God repaid them with bread for stone.

¹ Luke 7:31-35

² Luke 7:36-39

³ Luke 15:1

⁴ Luke 19:1-10

This heavenly profligate, entirely stripped of the glory and honor that He took from the Father, gave us the only example of the love and humility that is befitting to the saints¹. It is hard for us to admit – even though we sometimes think so – that the parable of the spendthrift son has gotten old and doesn't concern us anymore, and even if there's something in it that captivates us, we don't know how to draw from it. Yes, we are moved, even to the point of affection, by the image of the repentance of the poor wretch whom his brother begrudged a welcome feast, but we are unwilling to notice in its words something more than a moral lesson for Jesus' enemies.

The younger son is to us, at most, an uplifting example of a reveler who settled down, a rebel who at last – and to our indescribable satisfaction – admitted that nothing remained for him but the saving fate of a hired man. We are flattered by the conviction that, like this sinner and desecrator, we are behind the gate, and, having repented, by God's will we have become indispensable instruments of grace. *"After all, if we sinned, then not as bad as this one, who squandered his father's wealth – God forbid! – with harlots."*

But what the Master wanted wasn't that those who He spoke to would become decent overnight. Instead, He assured them that the evil that was hopelessly burdening their consciences before God would fall into oblivion if they put their trust and their hopes in Him. That is why, whenever we see in this great parable only a pitiful sinner and his brother, jealous of the father's favors, we only notice what the Pharisees saw: a story of a wise man who could in no way be contradicted. Ordinary human feelings make us have at least as much pity for the spendthrift son as for ourselves. Ordinary doesn't mean – contemptible. And, with one word, Jesus pulls short the blasphemers who have long gotten rid of them. For He knows that only he who loves his brother can love God.

But He is also saying much more to those who are already somewhat versed in the alphabet of faith and know that the truth doesn't kill, but it sets free, cutting the bonds of wickedness like a sword. And that's something that the Pharisees don't even dream of, because they have been blinded by murderous hatred. They don't understand that the Father's

¹ Matthew 11:27-30

fortune isn't money, and that the younger son didn't make that much of a fool of himself by misappropriating his share and running with outlaws.

"Harlots are the worst of human beings, worse than tax collectors, cranks and drunkards, worse than pigs" – that's what the experts in the law think. The Righteous One knows that and abases himself before the judges of this earth more than they can suppose. Today, we are also somewhat disturbed by the thought that a man can be willing to seem, to the eyes of those he loves, lower and less clean than the dirtiest of creatures. And he can have a really important purpose for that: to prove more human than all those who are as proud as gods.

Pigs, even though they have a taste for wallowing in the mud, have tasty meat, and until the time when somebody wishes to ascertain that, these unrefined creatures are provided with daily sustenance. Still, in the days of crop failure, the swineherd proved to be useless and too demanding. In the eyes of his employers he didn't even deserve the locust beans called pods¹.

And the Spirit of Jesus speaks to all those unrelenting in their spite gently, but firmly: *"Had the Father sent rescue for the pigs, a pig would hang on the cross. If the sinners were really as impure and repulsive as you think, on the cross you would see someone impure."*

And although nowadays even children know that Jesus died innocently, He himself acted as if He had defiled himself in the presence of the Father with the most abject of crimes. That's why the fate of the father's hired men was, in the eyes of the son, better than his own, seasoned with bitterness and yearning. For the hired men could at least sleep the sleep of the just, whereas the Son of Man found rest only at the moment of his death, disgracing his honor.

"I am no longer worthy to be called your son," says the faithful son in the parable in front of those who consider themselves God's elect and want to prove it by desecrating his incarnate image. And two thousand years later we are presented with the protocol of passion written down by witnesses, where the Messiah in the garden is grasped by an excruciating fear² at the thought that He now is to renounce the so far immaculate glory of God's sonship; He is to become, in people's eyes, a passive vic-

¹ Luke 15:16

² Matthew 26:36-39; Luke 22:40-44

tim, even though that's not what He is. He knows perfectly well that if, so far, He has tasted humiliation and contempt for his majesty, it was merely a foretaste of the disgrace in which even the Holy Father is now deserting Him and turning his eyes away from Him.

He who knew no sin knew best of all the living that the real dignity is the dignity of the Father's elevation – the same that draws the faithful to lose their souls for Him even today. The same that, by stripping itself on earth from what is due to it, fulfills by that the only law honored by the Father – the law of grace. We are the stewards of this grace, so it befits us to know the life and work of our gracious benefactor, who didn't come to judge us, but to save us from ourselves.

For this reason, although it's not quite convenient for us, let's try to see those two sons more clearly. Let's look less reprovingly at the supposed infamies and debauchery of the Son of Man, whose only good deed on this earth was, allegedly, that *at the end he came to his senses and returned to his father's dwellings*. Yes, it was the end of his journey, but the beginning of ours.

In this parable, never entirely understood, both sons have equal rights, but one of them holds a grudge against his father, saying that he has never got from his hands what he deserved in all those years; he denies his own brother a worthy treat and denies his father the joy of his return. Whereas the second son, knowing the generosity of the father's heart, asks for the share of the estate that falls to him (that is due to him!), squanders it with unworthy ones, and, rejected by them, asks once more for that which is most precious – to be able to be with the father, even as a farmhand. They both knew the will of the father, but only one of them wanted the father to be proud of him and say, "*Sit at my right hand.*"

Because the Son fulfilled the will of the Father, realizing his unfathomable design of mercy over sinners. Thanks to Him, people learned the name of the Holy One and many of them were adopted as sons through faith in the Son. Only the devil doesn't like the Father's thoughts and even a mere supposition that somebody can surpass him in his merits for the throne fills him with fury and venom, and it contorts his ingratiating and servile visage into a grimace of holy indignation.

The bad servant thinks badly of his master. He measures and judges him by his own standards, and he suspects that God is so malicious that

He wants to humiliate him and treats him like he treats the ones lesser than himself. Not for anything would he make an effort to do what his brother ventured only so that he could share with the Father the joy at the sight of backs straightening out and human eyes glittering with hope. The bad servant will always try to make our life repugnant to us, and he will always think that everybody should appreciate his toil and anguish endured for the ungrateful father.

The good servant, no matter how poor and deprived of his honor, will obscure his harm. He will never want others to be as afraid as he is afraid or to suffer as he suffers. In every place and time, he will find enough strength to show the way to the strayed, to give drink to the thirsty and to nourish the hungry. He won't hurl abuse at the heavens that they're ripping him off even from the scraps, because when indeed not even a scrap of royal honor is left him, and they cast lots for his garment, he will see from afar the father running to him. He will hug him not for confessing guilt, but for accomplishing the father's will.

No one will accuse him anymore that he expended the wealth he had been given. Even on earth wise fathers teach their children not to denounce others, because a denunciator always bears bad testimony of his father.

One day we will understand better this love that speaks to the reprobate as gently as possible:

*"Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours.
But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours
was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found."*¹

The parable ends with this patient persuasion, which here was to remain unanswered. Because only the Son of Man met the love of the Father halfway by praying in the garden of Gethsemane²:

*"I have manifested Your name to the men
whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours
and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.
Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me
is from You; for the words which You gave Me I have given to them;*

¹ Luke 15:31-32

² John 17:6-10

*and they received them and truly understood
that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.
I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world,
but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours;
and all things that are Mine are Yours,
and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them."*

Only the Beloved Son didn't let the wealth obscure the Owner, for He knew that life and truth are indivisible and there is no fork in the way to the Father. Satan didn't benefit from the explanation, because he never intended to say to the Creator: "*Things that are Mine are Yours.*" Neither was he going to ask for anything, because dependence is a disgrace to him.

Jesus didn't delude himself that He would convince the Pharisees. Even his disciples didn't manage to get rid of rebellious zeal while He was still alive. But He left to all his listeners a seed. They were to be reminded of its existence and power by the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, which was called the way and life by the Master himself. And the bread that He broke during the last meal was to bring to human hearts and thoughts an image of the greatest goodness that has visited our vale.

Satan fell from heaven like lightning, because the joy of the people whose burdens were to be removed wasn't to his liking. Today the miscreant is restrained only by the Holy Spirit, because only the Father, who fulfilled his promise, cares that we don't rashly take to court all that our eyes see and our ears hear, but ask for our share of the Father's estate, because only by drawing from God's fullness can we rescue others from destruction.

In this world you pay for everything, even for the truth, because, in order to hear it, you have to reckon with the one who is preaching it. But grace, like the water of life, is free. And it befits the witnesses and the partakers in the resurrection, who have forgiven those who had trespassed against them, to make efforts to convince others of the same. Because the calamity of our unfaithful neighbors consists in the fact that they think of the Father like the elder son from Jesus' parable.

Our advantage over them – the only one – is that we know whom we serve, and they don't. Let's not rashly dictate to them what they can eas-

ily notice by themselves – but only when the younger son draws them. For younger means lesser. However, Christ won't draw them if they don't see his image in us, who are human like them. If we don't happen to stand calmly when everyone is running and run when everyone's standing, keep silent when everyone's got something to say, and speak when everyone falls silent. It is not contrariness that is to inspire us, but the Spirit, who is Lord. From Him, and only from Him, evil scurries away like vermin when one removes a rock from its place.

The Pharisees couldn't understand how one could squander mercy like this. Neither did the apostles understand that, seeking priority in merits for the Kingdom. But after the death of the Messiah, through the Holy Spirit, it turned out that they remembered the most important lessons perfectly. And when Satan sent them Ananias and Sapphira, Peter didn't stammer when he was passing a just judgment on them in front of witnesses¹.

For, having brought the money to the apostles, they presented a part as the whole, similarly to those who *give their whole lives to Jesus* every two weeks, but they silently pant for revenge when regular human experience diminishes a little the brilliance of the crown that they have put on their own heads. If someone is afraid of peoples' judgments, it means that he is their prisoner and won't stand in the judgment of God.

A thousand years before, king David, ordered by a prophet, bought from a servant a threshing floor along with the cattle, in order to build an altar of atonement there to stop the plague on the people². He could have had all this for free, because he was the lord and shepherd of his people, but he stopped the zeal of the inhabitant of Jerusalem who would willingly have contributed from his own purse in order that the wealth of his king and priest would not be diminished. Led by a prophetic intuition, David preserved the testimony of the living God, who doesn't demand gifts and doesn't cry for help, because it's Him who grants help and bestows gifts.

That servant didn't know what his master was doing, but he obeyed him. Ananias and Sapphira knew and disobeyed. Firm evidence of that is the fact that they concealed the true sum obtained from selling their

¹ Acts 5:1-11

² 2 Samuel 24:21-24

property, as if having something of their own would defile them in the eyes of the Owner of heaven and earth.

Following the suggestion of the elder son from the parable, they wanted to seem clean to the Father, whom they considered blind and a tightwad, in order to be able to elevate themselves above the poor and deprived of honor, whereas God accepted the outlaws based on faith in the only one who fulfilled the law. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit pointed without fail to Peter these idolaters, whose deceptive intentions were aimed at the young and still weak church.

* * *

The children of wrath aren't able to forgive and don't want to, because forgiveness inevitably strips them of the glory in which they shamelessly parade; because, instead of gods believing in man, it turns them into humans believing in God. The children of wrath don't want to be humans. They are like dry, proudly protruding branches that bring no fruit. They flaunt what they have and don't even mention what they lack. They will point out others' wants in order to pester them, but they won't cover their nakedness with their own cloak.

Some of them will be broken by the wind, and then, if they ask, someone will appear by their side – someone who won't despise them. If they have even the slightest flicker of hope, he won't extinguish it, but he will fan it and shelter from the raging gale with his own body. May we happen to be close to these most wondrous events on the earth, when a stony human heart comes to life and says, laboriously at first, as if it was learning the alphabet: *"Yes, I am human, and You, only You, Jesus, are God."* But if the testimony of someone else's faith is to fill us with joy, it is befitting for us to remain people who know God, and not to pretend to be gods who know about people. For the gods of this earth, like human lusts, are insatiable themselves, so they can't satiate others.

Let us, therefore, sit down in the privacy of our homes and look into the *famous parable of a known man*, considered God by some, and let's once again repeat to ourselves this commonplace tale of dishonor and glory. If this time we also happen to graciously *turn a blind eye to the frolics and rollicking feasts of the spendthrift son*, let us consider to whom we showed our forbearance and mercy. It may turn out that the one who

received them was ... the Son of Man; that the more zealous or slothful ones, by hastily taking pity on the moral destitution of the supposed lecher, were trying, at any price, to forgive the One who died for us! And that indeed is a hard nut to crack, even for the healthiest of teeth.

Reason will tell us that maybe it isn't worth the bother, because *attempts to forgive Jesus for his awful reputation and not very refined taste* might turn out too costly for us. The Holy Spirit will reaffirm to us that, in any case, his Father with the angels rejoice the most because of a sinner's repentance. We should be content with the view of a softening face, an attentive gaze and a readiness to fight. It is more than a miracle anyway – it's faith.

And what about the harlots? Well, on the whole they can count, but they got it slightly wrong. Because they appraised their bodies poorly and live on human instead of God's grace, which doesn't throw wages and tacky trinkets on the table, but pours itself abundantly on bodies and souls redeemed with blood.

The Lord Jesus got us to understand that we would know the intentions of the wolves in sheep's clothing by the fruit of their faith. Listening to them, one could get the impression that they are personally indifferent to what they're saying and who they're talking to, if only they are being listened to, because without a hearing they are nothing. Their fruit will be sour, their jokes mean and uninspired, and their advice will turn out to be thorny wisps that will add to our anguish and bitterness instead of lessening them and making our short lives sweeter.

It will be hard for us to rest in their presence. If they were made speechless, they wouldn't know what to do with themselves, because they don't have God and people before their eyes, but empty-ringing words which they higgledy-piggledy assemble in the vanity of their minds. Someone else's consistent thought and hearty feeling will always be a threat to those who want to ensnare souls and rule them, instead of saving them, because they push and scare instead of drawing and reassuring.

They sigh for mountain climbing and spiritual heights, but we will never hear from their lips a mere human warning which tells a tired pilgrim that his companion knows the way that he has travelled himself. They don't betray their plans to us easily, but we will learn them from the parable of our shepherd, who not only knows the direction of his

journey, but also the plans of his adversary who was defeated at Golgotha.

And it is the latter one to whom it matters very much for us to deem the thorny glory road of the younger son a pardonable mistake, a vital failure and bankruptcy, which is overshadowed by the father, but not rewarded. So that we never, ever come to think that this sworn *brawler* and favorite of truly beautiful women had in him something irresistible – something that transcends all understanding. For the real hell spawn is the one who always enjoys our repentance but never the truth that illuminates our faces.

The elder brother slandered the younger, saying that he was philandering, but today we know that this isn't true and that the Wise One who told this story, and in it introduced to the attentive listeners himself and his adversary, is the Lord of the universe. Satan isn't equal to godless people, but to powerful angels, and only Jesus has the power to crush him under our feet. He was set above the heavens by the Father himself, who didn't leave us without counsel and might. This exaltation is out of our league – let's leave that to the Most High.

What does belong to us is the greatest authority to judge in heaven and on earth. The Son of Man gave it to us and showed us how to use it. Along with it, we also received freedom, without which we would know neither that we can keep our life, nor that we can lose it. The man who knows that he can resist the highest good and love is in God's hand; it's grace that has restored him to freedom, so he has reasons to be thankful, because he's alive, and *a live dog is better than a dead lion*¹. Only the dead don't make mistakes. And this proverbial dog will follow its master to the end of the world out of sheer gratitude.

Therefore, as long as we're alive, let's not be ashamed of the spendthrift son, but let's follow his example. For then the slanders of his super-frugal brother won't reach us. Let's lead a loose life, let's run with anybody, at best with those not worthy of our pity². Let's loose the chains imposed by the rulers of this earth. Let's not give less than forgiveness, because only love – like a father's cloak – covers over a multitude of sins.

¹ Ecclesiastes 9:3-6

² Luke 14:12-14

Sometimes the wronged and humiliated ones have to be the first to welcome their enemies. It is precisely then that they follow into Christ's footsteps – when they know that their suffering is underserved and their wrongdoers know not what they do. And when they never do this, or only once in a blue moon, and that for show, it would be better for them not to pretend that they have something in common with the dishonor of the Redeemer, because they'd go off their heads.

Rebellion is a human thing, but mendacity is a brand of the devil. When working in the vineyard, it's the actions that count, not the words. And a map, even the best one, won't stand for the journey. God supports everybody, even the biggest cowards, if they finally get up from their arts and crafts in the privacy of their homes and put their hands to the plow. Only the beaten know that they can get up. Only sinners know that they're alive.

It is Christ who convinced us that we were not fit for an offering to God, even though many see us as lamentable victims of fate. We, however, know that we are not clean enough to the Father. They rightly see us as convicts, because we consciously accepted the just decree and we're waiting for death as for life. There's only one thing they don't understand: why we are sometimes so merry.

And when the Good Shepherd comes to get us, their today's amazement will turn into a whine, a cry to heaven, that those taken up weren't those who deserved it. That grace was obtained *illegally* (without their consent, and even – how outrageous! – to their utter surprise) by simpletons, losers, profligates and other *wreckers of public order* – people who didn't feel like participating in the grand matters of the passing world.

Then nobody will be convincing anybody of anything anymore. For the elder brother had already heard why he shouldn't be angry with the younger one a long time ago. And the younger one knew his father even before the foundation of the world, because He and the Father are one¹. Those who do his will, will recognize Him², and the despised and humiliated will be guided by the hope that often blinks at a *fool*³.

March 26th, 1998

¹ John 10:24-30

² John 7:15-18

³ 1 Corinthians 1:22-29



Exposition

The moral judgment of the conduct of the younger son from the probably most famous of the Master's parables is nowadays rather beyond public dispute. Voices on both the inside and the outside of Christian denominations (often very much divided in matters of secondary or even slight importance) never question this particular judgment.

We should consider why it is so, if even with a cursory reading of the parable, an attentive reader has to come to a conclusion that qualifying the dissipation of the patrimony as a sin against God, even if it would be all spent on carnal pleasures, is a gross exaggeration.

How is the deed of the profligate different from – let's say – the deed of a thief, a killer or an adulterer? The answer is that this deed, or rather attitude to life, in contrast to the other ones, doesn't do anybody harm, so it doesn't collide with the greatest (and if we look more closely, with any) of Moses' commandments.

Why is it then that for centuries both believers and unbelievers have wanted to see in the lot of the younger son the image of human abjection and moral decline (even though it has very little in common with the true fall), and in the eyes of his father the readiness to forgive the faults of his offspring (even though it finds no expression in the mouth of the great master)?

What is the profligacy of the younger son? Is it the anti-pattern of true godliness, or maybe its most vivid embodiment, carried in the hearts of this world's greatest ones?

Who is the elder of the two sons: a small jealous man or a deceitful minion of slander to the ones who believe in the power of the secret order given to the younger one by the father?

Finally, why did Jesus tell this story exactly when – as Luke claims – He was being surrounded by the tax collectors and sinners – the people repudiated by the contemptuous judgment of the teachers of the law?

A detail of this extraordinary parable that is probably easiest to spot (and which has the power to sow in the alert mind the seed of blessed doubt) is the distinction – blurred in most translations (it is retained in the Polish Brest Bible and Jakub Wujek's translation of the Vulgate)¹ – between the term used by Jesus when referring what the profligate had done with the share of the Father's wealth that fell to him and the expression used by the elder brother when accusing the younger one of roguery.

This difference isn't trifling. It is serious, and even those who don't mince words too much should make a reasonable choice here.

For the narrator says²: *the younger son scattered*³ his share: like Ezekiel scatters his hair to the wind, demonstrating the foretold scattering of the unfaithful Israel⁴, or like God, who in his anger scatters those who are proud in their inmost thoughts⁵.

The meaning of this word is based on the root of the noun *body* (in the sense of a *trunk, shape*) and it is invoked in many places of the Scripture where something or someone *divides the body into pieces* (disintegrates, but doesn't annihilate). For sure it lacks a moral connotation – it is a basic word, accurate and handy, but in itself it can't serve evaluation.

At the very most, it can serve as a hint for a criterion of judgment. For example, when somebody is scattering grain, the judgment of his action depends on what he's doing it for – to sift it, to sow it or to cause it never to fall into the life-giving soil. The point is, in itself it doesn't define moral value.

However, the less friendly of the presented characters says⁶, *my brother wasted*⁷ the father's wealth, making him by that a selfish degenerate of a noble dwelling, deserving his miserable fate. It's quite the opposite of the previous meaning. It was used by Jesus when He spoke of de-

¹ It is also retained in Young's Literal Translation (translator's note).

² Luke 15:13

³ gr. ΔΙΕΣΚΟΡΠΙΣΕΝ – *dispersed, separated, scattered*

⁴ Ezekiel 5:1-10

⁵ Luke 1:49-53

⁶ Luke 15:30

⁷ gr. ΚΑΤΑΦΑΓΩΝ – *destroyed, devoured, ate up, guzzled, consumed, squandered*

vouring widows' houses¹, and Paul, when he scolded the Galatians for biting and devouring each other, instead of building each other up².

It points to the self-centered conduct that everybody knows perfectly well, containing also an evident moral qualification of the deed: such an intention can never serve anything that bears the name of good.

In my opinion, it is the false judgement of the prerogatives of God's servants that is the subject of this parable – and the next one as well³. This judgment is aimed at discrediting their undisputed contributions: to the good name of the father who loves sinners or to the dignity of the rich man who wasn't as concerned with the state of his claims as it could be inferred from the denunciation. Finally, wasting the possessions by the manager obviously meant trouble for the debtors.

That is exactly why Jesus makes this distinction, which is eagerly re-touched by the cherishers of the whims of the so-called *church fathers* to this day.

The second of the circumstances demythologizing the prophetic parable in my eyes is tied to the direct manifestation of will of the participants of the meeting that are dear to each other.

The son confesses to the father a sin against him and against heaven⁴. . . . I understand that he could be aware of transgressing against the law of patrimony that was known to him. How, however, should we explain the double assertion of offences against heaven?! How could he know that he was sinning against heaven if he had never been there?

Should we, in defense of the commonly accepted understanding of the parable, ascribe oratory to the swineherd or to the narrator of the story? I think not. It is much simpler and much more honest towards the Master to assume that the swineherd knew perfectly well what he was talking about.

Besides, which of the sinners claims in the act of contrition that he is no longer worthy to be called his father's son?! If he had been son before he sinned, then he isn't a sinner, because sinners are adopted as sons by the Father only when they believe the warranty of the Spirit embodied in the Firstborn. Why, these are the fundamentals of Christian

¹ Matthew 23:14

² Galatians 5:14-17

³ Luke 16:1-17

⁴ Luke 15:21

theology. Whereas the parable is speaking very clearly of the realities of the family ties as precedent to the supposed embezzlement.

It can't be put together while asserting that the spendthrift son is a *sinner living in ignorance of the decrees and the will of the Holy One*. No healthy child will digest this fairy tale.

It is also hard to find any gesture of forgiveness on the part of the father. Yes, the original tells us clearly about the agitation and compassion of the parent, which is understandable to all, but there is no mention of forgiving the faults of a *rioter converted to the right way*.

It is also worthwhile to pay attention to the minor, but clear premise speaking for the Father's firm sanction – not of the reprimand for bad conduct, but of commendation and a well-earned reward for the stubborn prince who was hungry and covered in dung.

The father orders that the incomer be given sandals, a ring and ... literally, the foremost robe¹. Not the *best*, but the first of all, not that which is of the best material, but the one that a special personage is entitled to wear, and not some, pardon the expression, *shady-looking, lecherous tramp who came to his senses a little too late*.

Assuming that the unmistakable honor indeed served the soul and the body of the lecher, it is also worth asking ourselves the question how many foremost robes are provided in heaven for the sinners and whether it is certain that there will be enough for those who shun the exemplary *licentiousness* of the profligate.

When reading this verse, for many years, I've invariably had the impression that the flattery for the human soul, which, like an elixir of life, has been sipped through a devilish straw for many ages by Christian domains out of an imaginary identification of their own fate with the lot and destiny of the spendthrift son, doesn't come from the wish for forbearance for their own or even someone else's moral laxity as much as from a much less godly hope for being honored by the Father in the way the Son was received by Him – the Son who was dead and is alive again, and who, in my opinion, had in mind something entirely different than what the teachers of the law, taking the elder brother's judgment of the younger one at face value, could have expected from Him.

¹ gr. ΠΡΩΤΗΝ – the first in time, place
or as regarding importance

After all, it is considered obvious until today that the royal splendor falls straight to converted sinners and that, on an aquiline heights, it doesn't demand better references than those trumped up in Sunday school. It is an obvious consequence of confusing the fundamental notions of faith in God's Son.

Towards the end, I will take the liberty of evoking the original reading of the sentence that was adopted to be considered as the moment of the *right, salutary decision* of the alleged renegade. It reads, "*Having risen, I will go on unto my father, and will say to him...*",¹ which can be disassembled into: "*When I rise, I will go...*" For in the original there are no – as the translators want it for incomprehensible reasons – two equal verbs, there is no: *I will get up and go...* In the place of the first one there is a perfect participle, which clearly indicates not as much a will, as knowledge of the swineherd concerning what will soon pass upon him.

Therefore, when the swineherd rises², he will go to the father and tell him that he has sinned and isn't worthy to be called who he is, and that only the will of the parent can restore him to his rights.

Is it, then, really so hard to assume that the God-fearing prince deprived himself of all that he had and all that he was, consciously becoming someone lower than the creatures fattened for slaughter (for which there was even no place in the Israelite menu, let alone the temple of Jerusalem), and, after consuming to the end his real destitution, not knowing sin, became sin in the intention of redeeming from it through faith the elect of his great parent?

Why is it that, when reading this magnificent parable, illustrating by Luke's thought and will the deep meaning of the exemplary sacrifice of Christ³, Christians forget about the canon of apostolic teaching⁴?

It is good and wise to count upon influential acquaintances during the resurrection. It is, however, very stupid to expect the understanding of the King of spirits for such blatant ignorance in the matter of what He considers good and bad himself ... Very stupid and very bad.

¹ The conformity of the transcription in the YLT to Greek syntax is a rare exception among the translations (translator's note).

² gr. ΑΝΑΙΤΑΕ – the same word is used by the

evangelists writing about *rising from the dead*

³ Philippians 2:4-11

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:21; 8:9

And, finally, a fundamental question arises: Is one of the most elementary convictions of Christians, upon which thousands of sermons and instructions were constructed – the conviction that the way of the younger son is something to be ashamed of, and not to follow – the foundation of their own sense of identification with the will and authority to judge of the Galilean?

I say it is. And even though I drank a few beers with *tax collectors and sinners*, and embraced a few *women of easy virtue*, still I don't envy those of them who, one fine day, will have to explain this conviction of theirs to the Judge of Israel. Because of them I wouldn't like to see that day. Because of the truth I long for it to come soon.

July 24th, 2011

*And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying,
"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And He said to him,
"What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" And he answered,
"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."
And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."
But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho,
and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him,
and went away leaving him half dead.
And by chance a priest was going down on that road,
and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also,
when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.
But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him;
and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him
and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them;
and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn
and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii
and gave them to the innkeeper and said,
«Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.»
Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor
to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?"
And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him."
Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."*

Luke 10:25-37

I DESIRE MERCY, NOT SACRIFICE

Samaritans had enough reasons not to like Jews. To some of the more morally sensitive ones, a homely swarm of flies buzzing over a heap of manure was nicer than the chosen nation with its caste of haughty priests, incapable of pity. Jesus knew that, so He bore no grudge that He was denied hospitality in a certain Samaritan village only because the messengers disclosed the destination of the Master's journey¹. The disciples were baffled by this straightforward refusal. Maybe for the first time it was made so clear to them that it isn't enough to be a follower of the Messiah to win people's hearts for Him.

Jesus easily called to order his enraged charges, who were rushing to the aid of others in their protective *bio-hazard suits*². However, only the death and resurrection of the Teacher ensured them that they didn't have to be afraid of stigma and rejection, because it was impossible to extend mercy to those who felt too ashamed to receive it, or even to think of this deepest need of their souls.

God isn't like man and He doesn't loathe the destitution of the poor. He doesn't repay with malediction and hatred for blasphemy and insult. And his anger is manifested not when He speaks, but when He is silent, leaving the ungrateful ones to themselves. His extraordinariness and moral virtue is also displayed by the fact that He speaks to everyone who wants to listen to Him, be it his ardent follower or a Pharisee – Greek, Samaritan or Jew – a man or a woman.

That is why Jesus, talking one day to a learned Jew, didn't hesitate to present to his eyes the picture of the merciful Samaritan. By abasing himself in front of the haughty iconoclast, He gave an example of mercy on the part of a person despised even by his followers. The learned man wasn't as insensitive and perfidious as the contemporary readers of the Scripture want to see him. It just annoyed him that the Master, while not rejecting the law, represented himself as the Savior of the world.

¹ Luke 9:51-53

² Luke 9:54-56

What passkey to the gates of the Kingdom did this Teacher have up his sleeve – the one who was forgiving sins and didn't demand sacrifices? The learned man knew what the substance of the law of Moses was. He had no doubt that in order to live, one had to love God as much as one could – at least as much as a learned Jew did. Obeying the law rightly seemed to him a sufficient means of meeting God's requirements.

There was only one thing he didn't understand: how could something that was utterly unattainable to him be a condition of life? Certainly, he could somehow love God with all his heart, soul and might. But the neighbor? . . . This must be insanity! If this man had a family, he knew perfectly well that neighbors are sometimes hard to bear, let alone to consider them one's equals. But in the law it is written in black and white: *Love your neighbor as yourself*¹. No more and no less – exactly as yourself.

*"And who is my neighbor?"*²

Luke described this question as an attempt by the man to justify himself. And he was right. But in order to be willing to talk to God, you have to think – like this Jew – that the smallest blemish on the conscience offends his majesty. That's why, even though the learned man was driven by evil and blasphemous intentions, the authority of messianic judgment caused him to ask a quite reasonable question. One exactly like the one that Christian believers ask themselves in their prayer closets – and don't find a good answer. This question has already been answered by the Master a long time ago, and that with dazzling precision, but our small hearts and hard necks are reluctant to agree with the paramount law of the Kingdom of God: *"I desire mercy, not sacrifice."*³

The accuser would like us to see in the picture of the Samaritan ministry⁴ an example worth following, thanks to which we will obtain a pass to heaven. Our inattention while reading the parable favors this clever lie. Enchanted by the expressive picture of human care and dedication, we are easy to forget the final words of Jesus, pointing at the aim that the picture was to serve.

¹ Leviticus 19:13-18

² Luke 10:29

³ Matthew 9:10-13

⁴ Luke 10:30-35

The learned man wanted to know whom he was to love as himself in order to meet the requirements of the law – in order to live. The answer he got was the following question:

“Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands?”¹

What was the learned man supposed to do? Only one thing: he was to love as himself the one who would bend over him like the Samaritan bent over the savagely beaten and stripped wanderer. He was to await and try to recognize mercy like one half dead and bereft of all hope of survival. He was to receive grace even from the hands of the man whom he most despised – not because he knew, admired or liked him, but because only he noticed his inert and wounded body by the wayside.

He was the one to look after this wanderer more than most of us, stopping to alleviate human misery. He expected no payment, refusing even to burden the host with the costs of care, for he knew that this crippled and penniless man whom he brought on his beast couldn’t even afford bread. That was all that the learned man was to do – no more. And no less. For undying gratitude in exchange for bringing back to life is the highest order of proof of faith in the Giver of Life.

Jesus knew that the person standing in front of Him was a blasphemer, a man who not only hadn’t experienced mercy, but also considered himself to be too great and righteous for grace. That he was shining with good intentions, but in fact he would be satisfied only if he could manage to drive the Messiah into a corner with questions about the law. But Jesus also knew more: He knew that this man, even though blaspheming in his spirit against the Almighty, deserved, as anybody, to be told which direction the way to the Father leads and how narrow it is.

Therefore, instead of condemning him and getting angry, He calmly explained to him in a parable what his fatal error was. He simply told him that maybe he didn’t know what a lamentable state he was in. And if he thought that God, wanting to save him from death, demanded from him miracles and proofs of obedience in the form of sacrifice for others, he had in front of his eyes a different God than the One that He himself came to reveal.

¹ Luke 10:36-37

The lessons of the Master were remembered by his faithful, though in-subordinate disciples, so that his words would be a testimony of their faith, that was still blind at that time, and of their vague hope, and consolation and refreshment for weary pilgrims who don't want to lose strength and precious time.

For this parable, covered by the dust of ages, shines also for us. It is telling us that in order to live and save this life, we don't have to love ungrateful victims of wayside robberies, but Him who deserves gratitude and honor.

For we too have been found somewhere by the wayside, almost lifeless, half-conscious, and our wounds were dressed. The tireless pilgrim ministered to us with oil, strong wine and a beast of burden. We woke up more or less sober in a wayside inn, far from the hubbub of cities and walls of strongholds. We learned from the Host who our benefactor was and that He had paid for our board a whole two denarii. Adding the price for our lives, it's rather a lot for someone who doesn't owe us anything. Besides, He apparently promised to repay to the Host all that He spends on us. What generosity! Who of us would have thought before that we were worth any credit.

Weird man – maybe He knows better? The way we were treated would be almost suspicious if not for the fact that the Host doesn't look hard on luck. He serves us at the tables without a murmur, sometimes gets into a conversation and smiles often, as if He remembered the day before, when we were coming back to life, very well. And when He's looking, the words of a love song pour down on us like precious oil:

*"You are as beautiful as Tirzah, my darling,
As lovely as Jerusalem,
As awesome as an army with banners.
Turn your eyes away from me,
For they have confused me!"¹*

¹ Song of Songs 6:4-12

A strange brilliance is coming from Him like from a powerful spring, and the very gentleness and radiance of his look makes us feel better, quite like when spring comes and the gracious sun is warming our chilled bones. Our Host makes an impression like He's always been here. Perhaps He is in some secret conspiracy with that man of mercy. Maybe He will really come back and we will finally see Him face to face.

The reason that the priest and the Levite didn't stop by the wretch wasn't that they were exceptionally mean and insensitive. It was because they were walking in the darkness like blind men and considered pity for this victim of robbery an unnecessary and too costly loss of time and energy. For the Christians animated by the Spirit of the Samaritan, the rendering of mercy is at all times the most pressing of personal needs. Not because it saves, but because it serves our salvation. For only by measuring our own strength against someone else's powerlessness can we gain a better and fuller knowledge of the greatness of God's mercy over us.

In order to live and bear life-giving fruit we have to love as ourselves only the One who one day ministered to us at the wayside. Because He, Jesus, is our neighbor and brother, and his abasement makes us the children of the living God. Our life is hidden in Him and only having known Him can we follow Him, and having experienced his pity, provide it to others.

Certainly none of us – like that teacher of the law – would ever think that, in order to give, one doesn't have to be good, but reach out for the good gift; that in order to love God, who is life, way and truth, one has to hate one's own life, way and truth – to see them with the eyes of the Samaritan from the prophetic parable.

Even Judas grasped the teachings of the Master perfectly, but didn't want to be his debtor – not for the world. He recognized the revealed truth as his own and today nobody is sorry for him, because he personally completed his disgrace. He hated the Savior so much that he was killed by the letter of the law to which he appealed.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone;

*but if it dies, it bears much fruit.
He who loves his life loses it,
and he who hates his life in this world
will keep it to life eternal.”¹*

From among the disciples only Judas, possessed by murderous thoughts, liked these words, because the command didn't cost him anything. So even though he was lying at the wayside like all of us, he despised the one who bent over him. He spurned grace like a wounded and beaten dog which in the agony of death bites the hand reaching out to it. He loved his own life so much that he hated its source and measure.

Therefore we will act reasonably if we don't pretend before God that we lack nothing and our near and dear ones don't annoy us and don't cause us pain by letting us down. Christ the Lord is coming with the needy and he is no quack, but the doctor of souls. If the needs are many, that's for the better, because the needy aren't a burden and God's scourge, but his indulgence, proof of faithfulness as well as relief and the Lord's blessing to his Church.

For it is the most indebted, most abject and most embittered ones that emanate with holy brilliance. They are the ones who understood who had brought them to the inn, dressed their wounds and paid for them from his own purse. They understood that this someone had to love them very much, because he demanded no gifts and sacrifices, but only wanted them to endure until he comes. So if they desire the more and are ever insatiable, it is not their disgrace and meanness, but the measure of their human greatness.

Because then they will follow into the footsteps of the Master and do to others as they would have others do to them; have pity in order to be able to know the greatness of the Father's heart. For they know that one day the Shining Samaritan will come back and repay them every nickel for the cups of clear water for the thirsty that are costly in his eyes.

In the wayside inn, even the last of the cripples will be comforted by the wine from the Lord's crops, the modesty and dedication of the women and the singing for the glory of God the Father and his Son. But what befits the heralds of salvation is rather the humility of a donkey, upon which

¹ John 12:24-27

rides the King of kings. For when – God forbid – the donkey wishes to master its Master, it will soon fall as another victim of robbery on the road from the city of fornication to the lofty stronghold.

And the Holy Spirit of the Samaritan will switch to a less demanding creature able to appreciate the grace given to it. For rescue was prepared by the Father for the people who mistook the direction of their journey, and not for beasts that kick under their Savior, which name an honorable calling destiny, refer to destiny as calling, and call good evil, and evil – good.

The faithful know that in each pearl there is a grain of sand, but the last who shall be the first buy the most precious one, because they recognize Christ's sufferings as a blessing and a costly test of their faith, which will be judged by the Righteous One.

April 3rd, 1998



Exposition

The core of the misunderstandings concerning this famous parable is the distortion of the internal logic of the teaching, which was intended as Jesus' answer to the learned man's question regarding to what he should do to obtain eternal life. The parable was to explain to the learned man the point of view of the Teacher, who by no means – despite the suspicions of the experts in the law and their cunning attempts – challenged the letter of the Mosaic law, but only made people distinctly aware of the groundlessness of their hope for justification before God by the works of this law.

For the sole presence of the Incarnate compelled the haughty rulers to face the hard-to-hide fact that they were at odds with the fundamental command to love their neighbor. Jesus, however, appreciated the efforts of the learned men, whose inquisitiveness, though not worthy of respect, but still noteworthy, made them face the necessity to draw conclusions from their own hidden, though valid doubts as to whether God, who

made something utterly impossible the condition of life, could be a God of mercy. Either God had to *have something on his conscience* or his law had to have a different sense from the one they knew.

Their hypocrisy, like the hypocrisy of many Christians, didn't allow them to openly admit their ignorance concerning the dilemma above, because then they would have to show dependence from a man whose life and ministry they despised. Therefore, Jesus deliberately painted before the eyes of the learned man the Samaritan bending over the victim of robbery, towards whom not only he, but also the disciples would have (to put it mildly) mixed feelings, closest to vapors of contempt.

And even though the question with which the ruler clarified his doubt was of self-justifying nature in relation to the mentioned ignorance, salutary to him, he had to admit inwardly that the God whose mercy was heralded by the Galilean peasant wasn't devoid of traits that were quite human, but alien to him, taking into consideration the fact that He established ordinary gratitude for an act of sacrifice – extraordinary at any rate – to be the condition for fulfilling by man the command to love his neighbor.

In the end, Jesus encouraged the learned man to look at this troublesome neighbor from the pages of the holy volumes from the perspective of the injured, because He knew perfectly well that the blessing of the living God streams down on such. This blessing isn't a fruit of human merit, but a gift for those on the lookout for hope.

This is the thought that the Master left the learned Jew to swallow. Its edge offends to this day all those who don't want to be found by the Lord, but *approved* by Him for merits altogether unlike the Samaritan one. The image of the undoubtedly good deed also scares many licentious *VIPs of grace* whose bragging about the greatness of their works of mercy doesn't convince even the recipients of their embarrassing and brazen magnanimity, not to mention the testimonies of the bystanders, who rightly doubt whether it's God who's paying them for the charity shows.

The total dependence of the injured (may there be more of them!) from the ministry and the purse of the benefactor was to thwart in the Master's picture any thought that the Lord's commandments are arduous. It was also to remind the faithful of the condition of repayment for the deeds of

mercy on the part of the one whom the bad rumors describe as an unexampled miser, and the good ones say that his generosity and affluence can't be measured by any human standard.

*The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said,
"There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor.
The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle,
but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought.
He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children.
It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms.
It was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man,
but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle
to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him.
Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man
and prepared it for the one who had come to him."
David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan,
"As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die!
He must pay for that lamb four times over,
because he did such a thing and had no pity."
Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the Lord,
the God of Israel, says: «I anointed you king over Israel,
and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master's house to you,
and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah.
And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more.
Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes?
You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own.
You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.
Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house,
because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.»
This is what the Lord says: «Out of your own household
I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives
and give them to one who is close to you,
and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight.
You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.»"*

HARM AND COMPLAINT

King David knew well that the penalty for adultery in his country was death. Had he lived in the times of grace, he would have seen the reason for which love towards a woman is able to resist the lust for her body. But this judge and prophet of Israel saw only flesh and blood, and the deadly letter of the law, the requirements of which he was trying to meet, was hanging over him like a sword, arousing lustfulness and blaming him for disobedience.

Therefore, when the messengers informed him that the feminine charms that he saw bathing, belonged to another, David was all the more seduced into using earthly power against the law. Bathsheba didn't resist, even though infidelity towards a husband while he is fighting for a just cause degrades a woman in the eyes of the judges of this earth¹ to this day. It's obvious that the royal bed wasn't unpleasant to her.

The fruit of sin isn't new life, but death, so then it also became clear to David that, if it got out who the father of the conceived baby was, the judgment would be delivered on the guilty lovers. But if the thing could be hidden, it would be like in the saying: both the wolves have eaten much and the sheep have not been touched. There was only one thing that was unforeseeable: that the valiant knight, Bathsheba's husband, would be more faithful to the law than David himself. For when the king summoned Uriah from the battlefield and wanted to induce him to a well-earned respite of hearth and home in the embraces of his own wife, he didn't suppose that he would hear the following answer:

*"The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelters,
and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping
in the open field. Shall I then go to my house
to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife?
By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing."*²

¹ 2 Samuel 11:2-4

² 2 Samuel 11:5-13

David's deception came to nought. He still counted on breaking the honor of the knight by inviting him to a feast at the royal table. Uriah probably didn't even suspect what was going on, but, although drunk, he didn't go to sleep to his own house, but lay down at the gate with the servants of his master. Neither did he understand that *to obey the king* sometimes means *to save one's own life*. All that was left to David was to sentence to death the inconvenient witness of his disgrace.

Uriah sealed his own fate by bringing the letter containing the king's decree to his commander, Joab, who was besieging an enemy stronghold in David's name. And this lackey didn't ask why the life of one of the king's choicest warriors was to come to an end. His heart favored this secret conspiracy with the anointed, thanks to which he was to ingratiate himself with him later¹. So he put Uriah up in the very front of the fighting, so that the enemy wouldn't be able to miss, and later reported the completion of the task with the devoutness of a martinet².

The womanly tears didn't flow for too long³. Why, the king himself remained faithful to her – though he seduced her, he didn't leave her. David was home free – and he also had a beloved, one more wife and a child, like many before him and after him.

Every man happens to gaze at somebody else's property for too long, but not every adulterer and killer is visited by a prophet. David was visited by one who, out of the blue, told him a certain story:

*"There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor.
The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle,
but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought.
He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children.
It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms.
It was like a daughter to him.
Now a traveler came to the rich man,
but the rich man refrained from taking
one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare
a meal for the traveler who had come to him.
Instead, he took the ewe lamb*

¹ 2 Samuel 14:1-22

² 2 Samuel 11:14-25

³ 2 Samuel 11:25-26

*that belonged to the poor man
and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”¹*

In his anger, the noble king condemned the rich man; he would probably also be the first one to throw a stone at a harlot. Still, the truth is that the eyes of the judges of this earth sometimes become blind, and the sternness of their judgments testifies only of the squalor of their insides.

David was quick to pass a sentence in someone else's case, even though the prophet made no mention of the poor man's complaint. Only the judgment of his own case was out of his way, for Uriah, even if he had wanted to complain, couldn't do it anymore. Because the murdered make no voice either – it is only their blood that is crying out from the ground. And those who demand justice for their neighbors in their own name are weighed down by a terrible burden – not of the faults of others, but their own.

The reprieved know that, but David had no way of knowing, because grace came a thousand years later with the King of kings and the Spirit of the Father's promise, who fulfilled its letter. Therefore, although he gained awareness of his sin, though he confessed it and never again committed any like it, he couldn't believe in what the prophet announced to him:

“The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.”

For the prisoners of the law are judged by the law². If they are faithful to the law, devoted to people, have a lot of strength, and power – they are able to accept even the most severe sentence from the mouth of the Righteous One, but they aren't capable of true remorse and of tears of gratitude towards the Father whose love they cut to the quick. Even if they hear a hundred times: “Son, I forgive you, go in peace,” they won't experience forgiveness, for they don't know the Father and have no idea who the Son is.

David prophesied many times of the one who was to come, of the seed of promise, thanks to whom the burden doesn't cease to be a burden, but doesn't weigh down, and the yoke doesn't oppress. In tens of psalms

¹ 2 Samuel 12:1-12

² Romans 3:19

he poured out his spirit, and his descendants preserved his beautiful laments and eulogies, interwoven together like a woman's braid.

But we know one thing about this king and poet: this man, like every judge and ruler of this earth, was afraid of punishment. Thus, he was angry with his sons and snarled at the willfulness of his nephews, but his rod didn't touch their rebellious backs¹, because he didn't want them to experience, like himself, the sentences of the law, the letter of which kills, but doesn't justify – tells the truth, but knocks the wind out of one's sails and destroys the faintest glimmer of hope.

David received the lesson, but never understood it, because he couldn't grasp that the highest expression of human humility before the living God isn't a head that's bowed down, but lifted up, and an unveiled countenance. Therefore, even though he extolled God's love in his psalms, his real life faded, because he wasn't yet able to worthily claim what he didn't deserve.

When his firstborn raped his sister, the king was angry, but didn't even lift a finger². When Absalom belatedly stood up for her honor and avenged her disgrace and bitterness with his brother's death³, five years were enough for the father's weakness to result in an open rebellion of the son, whose lust for power turned him against his parent⁴.

And when it came about that the aged ruler was to give up the royal office, another cowardly wimp and usurper was very close to mounting the throne⁵. Only owing to the intercession of the faithful Nathan and Bathsheba, her son, Solomon, gained enthronement and majesty. For it was they who dared to refer not to their own merits or even their unquestionable distinction, but to the royal word, to the promise given to his wife, which David seemed to have forgotten.

Four of David's sons didn't live to be old and grey. Three of them were brought to ruin by their own pride, which answers violence with violence, and the law serves it only to judge others and justify itself. Only in the life of one of them, a seven-day-old infant, David couldn't spot the offenses that were later committed by the other ones.

1 1 Kings 1:5-6

2 2 Samuel 13:1-21

3 2 Samuel 13:22-33

4 2 Samuel 15:1-16

5 1 Kings 1:5-30

Bathsheba's child died uncircumcised, even though the king was hoping to reverse the sentence that was pronounced on it by fasting and praying¹. His servants were hesitant to report the infant's death, fearing that the king would lay his hand on himself in despair. In their concern, they turned out to be more humane than their master, who astonished them with his composure and dignity when at last he heard that what he didn't want, but what he reckoned with like a beggar at the moneylender's, happened.

This time there was no room for remorse, because to David, like to every prisoner of the law, it was more important to save his face than his soul. The king was well prepared for the blows coming. That was, after all, just the first of the four sheep atoning for the committed atrocity which he himself judged.

David's heart never softened, even though this great prophet and shepherd of Israel knew that his God doesn't despise a contrite spirit and human destitution. It didn't soften even when one day his subjects heard his lament coming from the upper room:

"O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!

*Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"*²

David was crying for his killed son, who grew up in his presence and was in his eyes like a lamb that is led to slaughter – not because he was without blame, but because the father loved this little proud ingrate and would be ready to give his own life for him. But this grief, inconsistent with his dignity as an earthly ruler, for his son who had made an attempt on his office and life – this grief couldn't yet change the stony heart of the judge into the heart of flesh of a defendant. For it was inconceivable to David that the offspring of promise, whose coming he was heralding, would be conceived in the womb of a Jewish maiden, not of the will of the flesh, but of the Holy Spirit.

It was inconceivable to him that this Son of God, punished with a rod of the sons of men³, would really be free of guilt. And even though they would accuse him, insult him and spit on him, from the mouth of the poor man⁴ – exactly as in the parable of the faithful Nathan – no voice

¹ 2 Samuel 12:13-23

² 2 Samuel 19:1-4

³ 2 Samuel 7:1-16

⁴ 2 Corinthians 8:9

of complaint would be issued, and when the women would raise their lament over the tormented man, they would hear his words:

*"Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me,
but weep for yourselves and for your children ..."*¹

For the rich man from Nathan's parable was neither a miser nor a degenerate – he didn't take from his own sheep for his guest because he loved them very much and didn't want any of them to perish. For the greatness of the Father consists not in sacrificing bloody offerings, but in giving – even to him who always demands sacrifices, but never mercy.

Because the Father welcomed even his rebellious son of perdition, whose blasphemous intentions were aimed at his own children. For Satan wanted to snatch them from the hand of the Almighty and made every effort so that the people on earth would hate the hand that stretches out to them day by day and calls them to the source of all creation. And it was him who instigated David – like everyone who relies on the works of the law – so that accusations would poison his life and pastoral ministry.

Satan, God's son, demanded the blood of the only begotten Son and got it, and the magnanimous feast, which had been foretold a thousand years before, came to pass at the Place of the Skull. Its memory scorches this merciless guest of our Father like burning coals to this day.

It reminds him that he has no rights whatsoever to the children of the Most High, if they obey the only command that saves and preserves life. If they believe that the poor man didn't bear a grudge towards the rich one, and the rich man did him no harm, but it all happened for our sake², before anyone thought of us good or bad³.

Both these men knew each other very well and the poor one fulfilled the will of the rich one, because He loved those whom the Father had given Him before the foundation of the world.

When David was comforting Bathsheba after the death of the child torn from the law, her husband was already dead. Uriah's death, although it brought David shame in the eyes of his descendants, still made possible a legitimate union of the royal pair. Its fruit was a son whom the Lord loved, Solomon⁴.

¹ Luke 23:26-31

² 2 Corinthians 8:9

³ Ephesians 1:3-12

⁴ 2 Samuel 12:24-25

Grace and splendor at David's court fell to a woman who wasn't too decent and probably this impulse of the heart didn't pay off too well to the king. If we didn't turn a blind eye on the king's weakness, we would see in his beloved only a woman of easy virtue – just like we fail to see in sinners, and especially in ourselves, anything good.

Our King also has a weakness for us and desires the charms of his Bride, so it is worth to remember the love which doesn't deceive and coerce, but attracts and blesses, because it sees the beauty that we don't see. For also of Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, it is written that she was a woman of unusual beauty¹.

It is also befitting to the present-day knights of the King of kings to obey orders, if they want to preserve their lives. And let their nobility be measured rather by the faithfulness of their beloved than by martial feats away from home, where they could fail to come back with their shields. For it isn't always the graceful messengers from the house of David who happen to come while the husband is absent.

Sometimes the ones who show up are those who venerate virtue more than the great David, and, instead of loving the woman to the point that it hurts, they put her on a pedestal and offer her a mirror instead of truth. Nowadays we know that no woman is worth the sin, but no woman would like to feel, let alone to hear, that she isn't worth anything. Let's remember that life wasn't created by the law, although it was the law that brought us to the life-giving springs. It was God who gave it to us and it is only over those overwhelmed by his love that the law – this *dead husband*² – doesn't rule.

The choice is sometimes painful: either virtue or love. The Son didn't bargain with the Father, but gave himself up for us, because He knew better than us that we all have dirty feet. Let this ministry of His not offend us, and let our specialty be washing clothes and not brainwashing. For it's this pity that was shown us that teaches us and encourages us to mutual submission and humility, strengthening our faith on the battlefield, where men and women fight shoulder to shoulder.

Nowadays we know that all that the law says, it says to those who remain under its forceful influence³. And the law enslaves everyone who

¹ 2 Samuel 11:2

² Romans 7:1-4

³ Romans 3:19-20

departs from the throne of grace, because without it they are unable to discern the Lord's body and imitate – better or worse – David instead of Christ.

To the slave who eats and drinks judgment on himself, instead of submitting to God's¹, the traveler from Nathan's parable will always be a *welcome guest*, the rich man a *pitiless extortionist*, and the poor man an *unfortunate victim of fate*. He will never see that he himself is unfortunate, because he judges according to the flesh and doesn't understand that he has only one enemy, who can be overcome in only one way, as there is one faith and one baptism.

The free man will sometimes feel like one of those mangy mongrels on street corners, warming themselves after a frosty winter in the first rays of the spring sun. Big and small dogs on leashes and wearing muzzles won't envy the supposedly ownerless stray. But the stray also won't envy any other, because grace warms everyone, but saves those who don't forget where the light comes from. He won't snarl at nor repel the invisible hand that pours oil on wounds and cheers up with strong wine, for pity won't offend his coarse conscience.

May 9th, 1998



Exposition

Nathan's parable doesn't tell the king anything about the motives of its characters. So it seems like it doesn't have anything more to tell us as well – apart from what we can guess by putting ourselves in the shoes of David, the murderer of a brave soldier and faithful servant. The visit of the traveler, therefore, seems to us a good and desirable event, the grudge of the rich man remains a token of utmost avarice in our eyes, and in the fate of the poor man we are able to find nothing but a gross injustice crying out to heaven.

¹ 1 Corinthians 4:3-5; 11:28-32; John 6:27-63

However, is the meaning and purpose of this prophetic parable limited to submitting to the eyes of the offender the image of his own disgrace? Isn't it rather more like Caiaphas' oracle¹, uttered by lips unaware of its real sense? I think it is exactly like this – and that Nathan conveys in the chronicle a clue to the knowledge of God's design that was yet to be revealed, the fulfillment of which would be Jesus' conscious sacrifice.

In this flat engraving, it is worth to note the distinction between the range of the ownership conditions of both men – the rich man begrudged to welcome the traveler with what belonged to him, and he didn't take *any other* lamb that didn't belong to him, but the one which he knew to belong to the poor man. The story says nothing of violating the poor man (*seizing the lamb*) and it is appropriate to deem suspecting the rich man of using someone else's property a plain conjecture.

To a base and greedy intention, the object of its lust is neutral, so it is meaningless to it in whose hands it is and who it belongs to. A thief doesn't rob a bank out of a weakness for bankers or their depositaries; similarly, one doesn't rape or murder one's near and dear ones, with whom the perpetrator is connected by mutual vital affairs, because the principle of operation of all evil is to reduce the object of lust to an instrumental role in order to satisfy one's own need. And it's precisely this rule that David acted on, bringing to his court the wife of his subject.

Yet the prophet doesn't tell us that the rich man is a grabber or thief, that doing evil is ingrained in his nature and that he despises those lesser than himself. He only tells us that the rich man is in need and that for unobvious reasons he decides to welcome the traveler with what the poor man has. Only the value of the feast is the mystery here, for the rich man – if he really is rich – can't see in a poor man's lamb a greater value for himself than in one of the number of sheep and cattle that he owns. He can, however, know that it is valued higher by the traveler – in a similar way as the traveler from the Book of Job, seeking strong arguments against his generous host².

In that case, the reason which substantiates reaching for the offering that is more valuable to the guest can be viewed as reason of state, which subordinates smaller reasons in order to save the life that it con-

¹ John 11:47-53

² Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6

ditionally protects, particularly by making use of such voluntary evidence of devotion that only the Son who loves his Father is able to provide. This Son made it clear that nobody was taking away his life¹.

It is well to remember this possibility if one wants to slip away from the pillory of the Old Testament authority to judge the sins of kings. The value of the sacrifice – saving to sinners – lies in the voluntary submission of the Son to the Father's will. The seed of the literal testimony about it has been preserved by the chronicle of the bloody history of the prominent ancestor of Jesus.

January 9th, 2012

¹ John 10:17-18



Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, «Give me legal protection from my opponent.» For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, «Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.»" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: «God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.» But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, «God, be merciful to me, the sinner!» I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 18:1-14

THE BLACK AND THE MERRY WIDOW

On the border between Samaria and Galilee, ten lepers asked Jesus for mercy¹. When, in response, He told them to go show themselves to the priests of earthly righteousness, only one of them understood that he didn't owe his healing to the observance of the provisions of the Mosaic law².

We don't have to jump to the conclusion that he was the worst good-for-nothing scamp of them all, disregarding the law. Let's just assume, following the Messiah, that he was able to direct his gratitude to the right person³. Everyone knew, back then, that Jesus was a powerful man and a healer, but few of the healed ones fathomed that their benefactor was the Righteous One.

On the whole, the Pharisees lacked nothing. They were healthy, well-mannered, had power and education. Hence, they were attracted to this strange man only because of his power, but He was in their way because of his concern for those burdened and oppressed by the yoke of the old order. However, they wanted to be well-informed, in order not to miss the Messiah, whose coming had been announced by the prophets, and this Galilean seemed to know a lot about it.

Jesus easily, though with a heavy heart, restrained their greedy dreams of the kingdom on earth, reminding them that God's judgment and the second coming of the Son of Man could surprise many good-natured and peaceful people, who would turn out to be short of a touch of saving reason⁴.

At the same time, He reassured his charges that at his side they were safe from danger. And even though He knew perfectly well that his disciples were fueled with the same lusts as the Pharisees, He treated the elect with more grace. And his anger welled up within Him only when they

¹ Luke 17:11-13

² Luke 17:14-16

³ Luke 17:18

⁴ Luke 17:22-37

wanted to send a Samaritan village up in smoke¹ or dissuade the Master from the thought of disgrace and humiliation².

He showed his patience even when they were quarrelling over who gets to bear the palm, for He knew better than they themselves did that it was Him who found them and called them, and not the other way round, and considering that, He owed them at least a part of the explanations for the issues that were troubling to themselves³.

The disciples were getting it all mixed up. They didn't understand the simplest and clearest words that He directed to them, but the extraordinary power of his words along with his authority imperceptibly marked them with the sign of Jesus' commission, like the hounds that know the hand of their master. That's why, when the Holy Spirit descended on them, their perseverance resulted not only in a joyous elation, but also with readiness and obedience towards the Lord's will that the Spirit had reminded them of.

Great debtors love the most, so in times of oppression and tribulation for the word of the gospel those who are faithful until now are sometimes sustained only by remembering who they belong to and the price they were bought for. They receive insults, abuse and slander with uplifted heads, for they know that two thousand years ago there stood on earth a man who, in God's Spirit, foretold his disgrace and glory as well as the torment and greatness of his Church.

He was speaking in parables, because half-witted people would accuse Him of madness. They were looking for flaws and falsehood, but didn't find any. Despite that, their insanity made them count Him among criminals and deceivers. These people were like a widow in a certain city, who was seeking legal protection from a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man, and took up her case only so that she wouldn't slap him in the face.

Jesus knew his enemy, so He also left us a hidden warning, accepted by faith and despised by unbelief. The widow, after all, wanted so little: *only that her kids would grow up to be decent people, so that somebody would help her when she would be incapacitated by infirmity, that her house wouldn't be consumed by fire or flooded, that people would speak*

¹ Luke 9:51-56

² Matthew 16:21-23

³ Matthew 18:1-6; 20:20-28

well of her deceased husband. And, above all, she wanted nothing in common with that repulsive mob of scoffers, drunkards and cowards, unless she saw one of them furtively wipe a tear.

She was able to explain everything. A certain judge helped her with that. He was waxing eloquent, nice, neat and a little impudent – such a regular man. She had pestered him for a long time, that’s true, because he’s such a well-known and successful judge, but eventually he agreed to defend her.

He has shown her great favor by doing this, and his clemency was to fill her with gratitude till the end of her days. *Thanks to him, she isn’t like those idlers who do nothing but steal, lie and fornicate. Not only aren’t they suitable husbands for her daughters, but it’s even difficult to call them people.* Yes, she felt very much relieved in the respectable club of the righteous.

Yet there was one thing she was never able to understand, though she had the Bible down pat: why Jesus once asked a strange question:

*“Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh,
shall he find faith on the earth?”¹*

“What?! Why, as for her, she absorbed her faith with her mother’s milk. Didn’t this Messiah exaggerate a bit? Maybe there aren’t too many as faithful as herself, but really, God can’t be blind and lame! For sure He will find it. I can’t believe He entertained such doubts. Like a child. That is indeed indecent!”

Jesus announced one day that Satan had demanded permission to sift God’s elect like wheat². But in the parables He left his disciples a powerful – and only – weapon fit to strengthen their faith in the face of murderous blows, aimed always perfectly at the Head of the Church.

Today, the vast majority of Christians overflow with mercy, but they’re none too attentive, and when someone steps on someone else’s toes unawares, he raises a really dreadful hubbub, as if he messed with a judge whose only concern is addressing the needs of the disadvantaged (just

¹ Luke 18:7-8

² Luke 22:31-38

like once the impassioned concern of a rebellious prince was to false-heartedly assure his father's subjects of the callousness and indolence of the judge's office¹).

Admittedly, the devil perfectly defends the faithful from the Spirit of Christ. He assures that Jesus got it wrong when in the Sermon on the Mount He blessed the suffering, the meek and those who thirst for righteousness. For righteousness that surpasses the one of the Pharisees – the one that comes from faith in the Righteous One – is a terror to his machinations.

Christ established the Church as a mainstay of faith and promised never to leave those who trust Him. Those who took Him at his word, He baptized with his Spirit, so that they would be able to withstand temptations as they follow into the footsteps of their Master. One of those desert temptations sounds like this:

"Make this hardened sinner good for something. He is like a wasteland, like a stone; he mocks my holy rules and convictions. Lord, make him change and become useful to others, or at least preach the gospel like I do. You know my heart and know that I'm doing it all for You. You're the only one who knows how thirsty for righteousness I am and how much I want its good. Make bread out of this stone."

That's how fervent are the prayers of the widow in the care of the bright angel². Instead of washing her clothes, she washes and starches her own conscience, and hangs it like laundry in front of the house with dirty windows, and when some rascals, smeared in mud, kick their ball into it, she cries out to heaven for vengeance.

"Because, after all, she has a right to seek the repentance of sinners before the father. Why, she gave up evil thoughts, blasphemies, smirks, envy, pride and foolishness. Admittedly, it's going much easier for her since she got an automatic washing machine, but this detergent with bleach isn't too cheap; and some stains on the conscience are very hard to wash away anyway. And these impudent youths have no respect whatsoever for her toil and faith. Maybe

¹ 2 Samuel 15:1-6

² 2 Corinthians 11:12-21

she will go and complain to her defender again – he is so decent and has everything so well-organized. For sure he will do what needs to be done and not rip off the poor widow.”

Jesus was learned in the trade of a carpenter and knew that when shavings are falling from under the jackplane, it doesn't mean that the plank is meant for the fire. Quite on the contrary, it testifies of the intention and hope of the craftsman who took the plank into his hands. The Teacher knew that over time the Church, instead of *submitting to processing*, would take the jackplane into its hands in order to *whittle* apostates, rebels and disbelievers with it.

That's why, in the person of the widow bothering the judge who hates Him, Jesus presented the image of false piety, which prefers to see God as dead and distant than resurrected and close, for the latter is too bothersome to her – unless He appears as a *helpless babe in the arms of its mother*.

Therefore, the widow runs out of the frying pan into the fire, failing to understand that nothing but faith in the Righteous One will justify her. She expels evil thoughts by willpower and becomes thoughtless, abhors touching a frog, but welcomes unclean spirits with open hands; is afraid of bad words, but rejects the testimony of the Holy Spirit; doesn't allow herself to taunt and offend idolatrous sanctities, but becomes a holy cow; trembles before the sin of pride, but loses her dignity and credit from the Lord's cross; defends the oppressed, but only increases the oppression; is afraid to cause pain, but beats the face of the Judge of Israel with a stick; refuses the sting of envy, so she tells herself: *"I am rich, I don't need a thing."* Just any juveniles scare her, but she doesn't fear God and He is the only one whom she can politely refuse.

As for the great prophet, she would suspect him of heresy and unbelief, because he wrote: *"... my spirit grows faint – my soul refuses to be comforted."*¹ And in another place: *"I groan because of the agitation of my heart."*²

That's how Satan overhauls little souls owing to God their very Spirit of life, who prefer to listen to placable teachings and easily digestible manuals than to the Lord's orders and decisions. *"Thus says the Lord,"*

¹ Psalms 77:2-3

² Psalms 38:5-15

they preach and adjure through tears and womanly throes ... It would be better for them if they were reached by the hard and cold voice that the Jewish exorcists heard one day:

“Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?”¹

It would be better for them, because at least they would know what they’re toying with and that in order to fight for faith, one has to cling hard to the bare rock².

There is one defender and one accuser – they both show us grace, but each of them for a different reason: the first one – because He loves sinners, the second one – because he hates them. The first one is both the judge and the defender. The second one also judges, but he only poses as a defender, because crimes in the majesty of the law promote his designs. The first one is upright, and the second elevates himself above the law. The faithful know that it is worth it to ask the first one for help, but it doesn’t pay to bother the second one, even because of adversity.

Children have for their justification only the fact that they live and trust the adults – at least until they take a good look at them. We have only one serious acquaintance. In front of Him, each of us is more stupid than the heavenly law provides for, and He is the only one who met its requirements. Therefore, it just wouldn’t be proper to contend with Him. It’s enough to know Him and love Him as one’s neighbor, as oneself, for He is the one who redeems the human soul from the pit.

October 14th, 1998



Exposition

I assume that someone may feel like defending the assertion that Jesus’ widow in this particular place of the Gospel of Luke is accorded the name of a *somewhat misdirected, but sincere human will to satisfy God’s law*, just like the elder brother of the famous profligate³ *lacked only a touch*

¹ Acts 19:13-20

² Psalms 63:6-11

³ Luke 15:25-30

of forbearance for the allegedly reprehensible frailties of the latter. I will therefore disclose at once what raises my objections concerning the aforementioned, very popular concept.

Above all, when accepting this thought, along with it one has to also accept that Jesus had no important reason to submit to the eyes of his neighbors the image of such a drastic misunderstanding as the one that was the lot of the widow seeking justice with a godless man.

Since it's true (following Luke) that the parable concerns an important obligation of a believer towards his Creditor, comparing the unrighteous judge to God at the level of the intentions directed at both doesn't find any reasonable explanation that could help anyone not lose heart in the attempts to gain the attention of the Righteous One.

The odium of this obscurity inevitably falls on the profile of the Master, resulting in mistrust of every sound-thinking being. In my opinion, the Galilean would never authorize such a turn of events.

If, therefore, this parable really is about prayer (and I claim it's about something more), that one has to persevere in it¹ – and because prayer doesn't require physical or mental power, even someone weak can't grumble at it – then, assuming sensibly that Jesus wasn't talking to himself and wasn't mouthing platitudes either, one should expect to find in his teaching some reasonable sense which would be convergent with the intention of the Holy One taught in other words and places of the Scripture.

Yes, Jesus was original, but He also took great care so that his listeners would be able to find the traces of his life-giving thoughts also without his help, and snarled every time that the disciples would pose Him questions the only true answer to which they should have known long ago.

Jesus tells this parable shortly before the end of his ministry towards the disciples who already have inside them a fertile ground for truths hidden from others. Could He, in such a moment, see the point of absorbing the disciples' attention with some devious syllogism lacking one of its premises?

What role does the unrighteous judge play? Who is the widow? Why, at last, does Jesus openly doubt if upon his return He will find on earth the thing that He came to plant?

¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:14

Think about that for a moment, Reader: If you bet on someone in a sports competition, and besides you're his coach, when the time of the start is coming, will you keep telling him how to punch, jump and avoid blows, or will you shortly tell him what happens if he loses?

I think that if I was in the shoes of a master in any worthwhile area, I would choose the second option.

So I also believe – against everyone whose opinion on that matter I had the chance of knowing – that Jesus used a top-end argument, appealing not so much to the reason of the disciples, with which back then they weren't yet able to *sin*, but to their *survival instinct*, rightly telling them that the enemies of the truly good news deserve fire from heaven, the dealers of God's Word – a stout whip, and the traitors a noose, and not a resort or a drunk tank.

I think that in this parable Jesus is saying a simple, but very specific thing: He is warning them of the consequences of sluggishness, indulging one's own whims, lack of perseverance, excessive care for outward matters – setting in the example of the widow's endeavors, crowned with small success, the image of the consequences of a lack of a strong bond with the Surety of faith. He is saying precisely what will happen to everyone if they don't pray or run wild: the enemy, roaring like a lion, will mold them so that their own mother (which means, the Church and the Lord Jesus) won't recognize them.

In my opinion, this is a picture of an utter impairment of cognitive abilities, and also a self-confident dementia regarding many clearly sounding messages of the Prince of Peace. In short, it is an ominous picture and we can't place it in the range of illustrations encouraging with a salutary example.

If anyone, even a widow devoid of a husband's defense, goes to seek support from someone who, in everyone's eyes, is debased in the service of evil, one has to seek the motives for her will among bad intentions, detrimental also to others in knowing the truth, if her efforts are to be deemed a testimony to God's ministry by others.

Wrestling with the above internal contradiction of the translation, I came across two places in which the controversies of the translators seem to be serious, signaling a high probability of censorial invention.

In the first, the one closest to the letter of the original seems, paradoxically, to be the oldest of the translations – the Brest Bible¹. The other ones unanimously use a strong euphemism (and beat about the bush). In most cases we read in them that *the faithful should always pray and not give up*, as if the second verb also concerned the matter of prayer, whereas it really pertains to the general attitude of the believer towards evil.

Logically speaking, also here it is difficult to find grounds for the view that the word to *give up*² meant to *give up praying* – for before that Jesus clearly says that we should always pray, which precludes the possibility of controversy in this case. Considering the ensuing term as also relating to prayer implies ascribing to the Master a logical error – and at least a stylistic one (a pleonasm).

After all, normally nobody says: *Keep swimming to the shore and don't stop*, because it isn't possible to fulfill the first order and not fulfill the second one.

From Strong's modest perspective, it can be clearly seen how the sense of the second word is being stretched exactly so as to impose on the Reader the untruthful thought that what Jesus meant here was *not giving up in prayer*.

Keep away from evil, keep out of its range, don't let it pull you in – that's how the meaning of the deviously presented term should be understood in the light of the guidelines of the learned man. *Don't be vain, indolent, conceited, unsightly, cruel, abject, mean, depraved, malicious. Don't do harm to others, and lavish good from your own, and not someone else's reserves*.

Does the exposition of this verse sound so bizarre that it justifies the meandering and evasiveness of the translators? I think not. The Reader will easily find very similar verses in the apostolic domain of judging authority. However, the intentional narrowing down of the significance of the apostolic reference facilitates accepting the false interpretation of the whole parable – and that's the reason why it figures in the lectionaries as something certain and established, whereas in fact it is barely an inattentive conjecture.

¹ Literally: "And He also told them a parable belonging to that, that one always needs to pray and not become lazy." English translations

also consistently neutralize the negative undertone of the Greek root (translator's note).
² gr. ΕΓΚΑΚΕΙΝ

The second scheme is even more bizarre, but the gullible neophytes gulp it down like a piece of cake.

In verse seven¹, due to inordinate creativity, we encounter a nut that's a bit too hard to crack. Let the Reader not delude himself that it is by accident that the thought of *delay*² in response to a sincere desire for God's righteousness presents itself to his ears. Far from it – it is pure human cunning, which aims at the juxtaposition of the reluctance of the unrighteous judge to satisfy the demand of the widow with the alleged, supposedly corresponding, though coming from *more pure motives*, reserve of the Holy One towards the most vital desires of God's children.

Due to this over-interpretation, Christians have believed for ages that *God likes barnacles who storm the office of the Righteous One with an obstinacy similar to the widow's*.

No other explanation justifies the retouching of the meaning of the original word, which Strong translates in all other occurrences as *incessant patience, forbearance, long-suffering*³. Whereas linguistically this word clearly indicates an attribute, feature of a subject, and not – as the translators measuring the Lord's thought with their own concepts – his action. In this sentence, the troublesome word doesn't, therefore, tell us *what God does*, but what He's like. In this place, despite the appearances, it's a very big difference.

Even to common sense, in this sentence it is much easier to grasp the comparison of the efforts of the faithful in order to gain peace for their souls with commonly known readiness of their Creditor to meet them, than to consume the pretty unexpected announcement that God supposedly – though He's better than an ungodly person – *did have some important reason to hesitate in the most vital matter of his elect*.

No, no. That's not this God and not this tale, and if Luke heard something like that, he would spit in the storyteller's face, and not stroke his fuzzy head. Unfortunately, God's indulgence is one thing, and taking care so that God wouldn't have to deny himself at the requests of immodest daydreamers is quite another.

¹ Luke 18:7

² Only two Polish translations speak of *delay* here. As for the English versions, it is rendered

similarly in the King James Bible (translator's note).

³ gr. ΜΑΚΡΟΘΥΜΕΙ

Every guide of the flock understands that well, unless he made some unclean deal with the wolves – let’s say: *a sheep once in a while for protection* (mafia-like indeed) *from the wickedness of wrongdoers* ... Just like in our parable on protection by evil from worse – that’s, after all, the Caiaphas’ law that everyone knows well¹.

Neither will it be easy for the attentive Reader to obtain an answer to the question why the simple Greek conjunction, connecting equivalent parts of the sentence like the English *and*, in this, probably only instance in the Bible, is translated against its natural function as *though*, in order to play the role of a particle underlining contrast, divergence, whereas right here there is no divergence in the original.

For the second clause of the sentence is the second argument (apart from the efforts of the believers), strengthening the prophetic emphasis, for accepting Jesus’ simple truth that the absurdity of the widow’s advances for her own sake around the warranty of the godless man hurts the eyes of every prudent creature.

The fallacy of the circulating interpretations of the parable could seem relatively innocent to the Reader. Nevertheless, it serves the hypocrites as a doctrinal basis for the significance of the role of prayer wheels, *Hail Marys* or *Lord’s Prayers* repeated thoughtlessly over and over with the intention of exhibiting the *perseverance in prayer* supposedly ordained by the Lord.

The appliers of this pseudo-spiritual stimulant are reluctant to notice that verbosity was never among the Lord’s prescriptions for the renewal of life and faith², for it has been a distinct testimony of mental laziness since the dawn of time – the laziness that Luke is mentioning in the short introduction³ to the substantive and reasonable admonition of the Teacher.

December 25th, 2011

¹ John 11:47-53

² Matthew 6:5-8

³ Luke 18:1-2

*One day Jesus was praying in a certain place.
When he finished, one of his disciples said to him,
"Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."
He said to them, "When you pray, say: «Father, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation.»"
Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend,
and you go to him at midnight and say, «Friend, lend me three loaves of bread;
a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.»
And suppose the one inside answers, «Don't bother me.
The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed.
I can't get up and give you anything.»
I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread
because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity
he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.
So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.
For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds;
and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.
Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?
Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?
If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,
how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*

Luke 11:1-13

FAITH AND GOOD INTENTIONS

Today, an observant judge could consider Jesus' disciples as rabble with a clear conscience. If the most prominent of them wanted to watch the Samaritans burn, what could be happening in the imaginations of the rest. True horror! Hatred, greed and pride, however, have also another side, a *brighter* one, so the disciples also sometimes happened to have seemingly praiseworthy fits of godliness. The readers of the Bible assess these more graciously, thinking a bit like this: *"The disciples had good intentions, but they weren't able to make it, they lacked the power that the Holy Spirit only later infused them with. They just made slight errors – went right instead of left, and the other way round. We can forgive them their lack of awareness and stupidity."* Yes – we can, but only provided that we draw conclusions from the disciples' errors and avoid them like the plague.

Today, the faithful know that such mistakes in the mountains and at sea are sometimes costly, so they strive to know their Guide and follow into his footsteps. But in the Church, as it was in the days of Jesus' disciples, good intentions are oftentimes like a license from the mayor, authorizing the holders of grace to frolic on the earthly wilderness, the Scripture and people's heads. Today, *love* is a bigger word than *Jesus*. Jesus is small, crammed somewhere for the sake of propriety or for decoration like a small cross round the neck or like a lone cherry on the top of the spiritual cake. If the more godly Christians didn't remember what the will of the Master was and is, all that would be left of Jesus would be a bumper sticker or a bland, sentimental picture of a rapturous being, a *good man who once secured a better future for the world*.

In the universal Church, mother still means more than father and when there is talk of the Father's mercy, the women grow silent and the men look down, because to both grace is a luxury and an excess, and most of the time simply a big nuisance. The needs are many. It seems that Christians do nothing but serve. They are so sensitive to the needs of others as if they had no needs of their own. They are so gracious as if

they had long forgotten what grace is. So when someone comes to them at midnight¹, they don't remember who he is.

What they do know is that they must immediately run to their friend and borrow three loaves of bread from him, to worthily receive the new-comer – as if he was to die of hunger before daybreak. They are so excited with their own charity that they don't even know whom they want to serve, with what, and what it is that he really expects of them. They hold him for their friend, but think of him as of a troublesome barnacle, who probably could have chosen a more fitting time for his visit. They don't understand that their devotion doesn't quite satisfy his wishes.

For He would prefer for Martha to finally sit by her listening sister², for the disciples not to want to be so much like his cousin John³, because prayer in spirit and truth comes by itself along with daily bread and the will of the Father, and also for them to rejoice more in the registration of names in the book of life than in the power over demons given to them⁴. Finally, He would prefer for the expert in the law not to scorn the Samaritan ministry⁵ and for the Pharisees not to keep suspecting Him of being a hellhound⁶.

Because this powerful and merciful guest always comes at an unexpected time, when the oil is about to burn out and the wicks of the lamps droop, when everyone wants to sleep – when they are much more tired than this tireless traveler, who has, amazingly, all that we lack: bread, oil and wine. To some, He will remain a guest who needs sacrifices, for in their eyes He was, is and will be a sacrifice himself. To others, He will shine with the desired life-giving brightness, which will satiate the nightmare-harried soul. The former will alternately adulate and abase Him. The latter will receive Him as He is and say to Him what Jacob once told the angel when the dawn was breaking:

*"I will not let you go unless you bless me."*⁷

For He who is bread himself doesn't need three loaves. And if somebody thinks that a friendly loan is better than a friendly ministry, let him

¹ Luke 11:6

² Luke 10:38-42

³ Luke 11:1

⁴ Luke 10:17-20

⁵ Luke 10:25-29,36-37

⁶ Luke 11:14-15

⁷ Genesis 32:22-31

take into account that along with the bread he will receive the poison of Satan's venom and instead of saving his soul, he will lose it. Neither will the ones who prefer, like himself, the body behind the veil of words to the incarnate word, satiate themselves from his hands.

Jesus made it clear that it isn't the devil who is bothering us, but often we start to bother him, whenever the Spirit of truth comes to stand beside us. We want to start cleaning up exactly when the Clean One walks in, we want to put everything possible in order exactly when the one who introduces all order walks in, we want to pacify ourselves at the mere thought of the presence of the peacemaker. We want to prove righteous before the Righteous One, merciful before the Merciful One, we desire to be good to the one who is our good. Finally, we want to be more patient than the Lord himself, whose patience surprises and comforts us so seldom.

There is only one thing we're having trouble with. The words of our guest sometimes gleam like steel from the armory. They are as formerly: hard, unrelenting, sharp and peremptory – one would like to say: indelicate. Sometimes when He says something we shudder as if the most dangerous adversary came to stand against us. *"It's hard to forgive Him that, but God told us to love our neighbors, so we're trying to bear with Him in humility, because it apparently is well-paid for in heaven. For sure they will reimburse us for these three loaves of bread procured at midnight."*

I guess they won't after all. For this gentle and poor friend always comes only for the most precious treasures of this earth. There is only one thing that He wants to hear from each of us: *"Ah, it's You, Lord, I'm glad You're already here. I've waited for You for such a long time, such a very long time!"* Our hearts often shrink from this brightness and say: *"That's all You want from me, just faith? But for You I would give up everything! I will lay down my life for You."*¹

But then He speaks softly, but firmly: *"I don't want your sacrifices, your bread, your humility. Look at me and learn that it isn't you, but Me who is gentle and humble in heart"*². *And I'm not just passing by, I want to move in with you. I don't want to take anything from you. I*

¹ John 13:36-38

² Matthew 11:27-30

want to restore what you have to its glory. I will give you more than you can expect, but I'm not taking trinkets as alms, I'm not taking what is external. That would be beyond my dignity. I'm waiting for you to give me what belongs only to you. Give me your freedom and you will see that it was bondage, give me your dignity and honor and you will see that it was pride and rebellion, renounce your independence and you will see that it was an iron yoke for you and your near and dear ones. Submit to the Lord, and you will rule. Don't act as surety for strangers, because you can't afford that. Rather believe the one who knows you and who acted as your surety."

Jesus' thought and admonition, hidden from the greedy eyes of his disciples, is summarized in one verse of the Gospel of Matthew:

*"Do not give what is holy to dogs,
and do not throw your pearls before swine,
or they will trample them under their feet,
and turn and tear you to pieces."¹*

The jewels of human faith aren't for the moneylenders. They are not for dogs and pigs who reach out for the gift, but do not want to know the Giver, who see the food and bed, but don't see the hand. They are not for those who consider their friends barnacles disturbing their peace of mind. That's why it's not worth it to wake the servants of the father of lies and all perversity at midnight, because when he drags himself out of his lair, in the end it will turn out that the loan is impossible to pay back, and the more zealous ones can lose their lives in the service of the devil.

The carnal eyes of the disciples saw two friends, but Jesus knew that only one of the fathers was good: the one who sent his Son in order to save sinners, and not so that they would offer Him idolatrous sacrifices. Only this Father keeps his word and doesn't *lend*, but instead gives good gifts to his children². And, fortunately, the Spirit of Jesus distributes them not as we want, but as He wants. The father of lies doesn't have a son – he only has children whom he pampers the way he can, and whom he doesn't want to wake at midnight, unless the unruly friends of his enemy bother him very much.

¹ Matthew 7:1-6

² Luke 11:9-13

Longing and desires of the soul aren't the fashion nowadays. What's fashionable are only spiritual dilemmas which avoid the sword the best they can, because they prefer the soft distaff of advisers who are versed in life's troubles, popping up everywhere like mushrooms after a rain shower. Only few lack the Wonderful Counselor. But *the Lord knows those who are his* and who wait with perseverance until He comes and slays the wicked with the breath of his lips. And the pure in heart will see Him¹ – those who deeply believe that a friend in great need is a truly great friend indeed².

October 22nd, 1998



Exposition

Today I'm not sure – as I wrote thirteen years ago – if in turning to a friend at midnight to borrow three loaves of bread one should see a *big spiritual risk*. I rather see in it a testimony of an entanglement in Satan's frauds that's already happening, exposed only for contrast with the attitude of faithfulness to the God-given word of promise.

Certainly, however, like in the parable about the widow and the unjust judge, one can't see in this activity an attitude which is expected by the Creator from his elect – it is even its contradiction, bearing Jesus' scandalizing irony.

Jesus is constantly trying to focus the disciples' attention on his dependence from the Father's will, not achieving a satisfactory result in his efforts. In the number of recent failures of the Messiah, Luke presents to the eyes of his readers the image of a serious misunderstanding concerning heavenly priorities, where the injured ambitions of the apostles are voiced³. After the return of the seventy two disciples from the *campaign against the enemy of truth* Jesus administers to his charges another cor-

¹ Matthew 5:3-12

² 2 Corinthians 5:14-17

³ Luke 9:51-56

rection of their slightly too triumphant route, advising a little different, *less convenient* perspective¹.

The learned man pestering Jesus with regard to the law² also seems to *have God before his eyes* rather than – what is more expedient – behind his back, and his stale deference for the messianic will differs from the disciples' deference only in that it doesn't flow from a great liking for the Galilean. The next *spiritual nudge* should go to Martha, who deserves it by daring to meanly reprimand her sister in a very improper moment³, and if we compare her behavior to the behavior of a man bothering his friend in the middle of the night in order to get three loaves of bread for another friend who came for a visit, it is easy to gain a valuable and revealing intuition concerning the purpose of the parable that was soon to be issued from the Teacher's mouth⁴.

If Martha knew what the Master really *has an appetite for*, she wouldn't cause in her sister the feeling as if it was Him (and not his listeners!) who lacked some urgent ministries. It's the same way, in my view, with the spiritual need of the *night barnacle*, whose perspective doesn't even take into account that, along with the unexpected guest, everything he needs came under his roof, and that this guest is even prejudiced by the thought that his host would hurriedly borrow something for him from the sleepy neighbor.

There is even a saying: *share what is under your roof*, which was coined to emphasize the honor of entertaining the guest with what one has (even if it's just a moment of time or a slice of bread), and not with what one is able to *borrow*, because modest people don't care about *what the guest brings*, but that he showed up at their door at all. Why assume that a Jew would leave his dear guest embarrassed by an unhealthy excess of his host's trouble directed in his intention?

Christians are so sorely offended by this benevolent irony of Jesus that they are unable, even for a moment, to put themselves into the shoes of the Holy One, who sees Martha's confusion, the hypocrisy of the learned men aspiring to faded laurels or the officiousness of his own pupils, borrowing, in a way, the puny title to their own good-work-based credit

¹ Luke 10:1-20

² Luke 10:25-37

³ Luke 10:38-40

⁴ Luke 11:5-8

from the adversary of truth – someone with whom the Master personally has a bone to pick.

Nevertheless, a man who has a clear conscience won't flinch from his own distaste on seeing the next eruption of the disciples' efforts to match the godliness of the adepts of John the Baptist¹, which weren't too useful in the current moment. The *blueprint of prayer*, showed patiently to the disciples, didn't serve them before Pentecost, because they didn't really know to whom and in whose name they were to bring their *parliamentary petitions*².

In the light of Luke's protocol, the presumption that the Master was delighted to see the readiness of the disciples to learn how to pray, is very arrogant. Exactly because He wasn't, accommodating the small ambitions of his pupils, He showed them in a parable what they were risking if they kept overrating the value of their own aspirations.

There is no way to defend the internal logic of the instruction other than assuming that the attitude embodied in the will to borrow three loaves of bread in the middle of the night is a negative model. If we take it *at the face value of little faith*, which the Master wanted to support with his encouragement to reach for God's gift, we are necessarily left with an analogy which can in no way be balanced – neither with the benevolent greatness of the heavenly Father, nor with the greatness of the abasement of the Lord's Servant. This results in a split of the judgment of the Teacher's design and makes the clear conclusions of the Master useless in practice.

Sensing this considerable dissonance between the picture of a barnacle overusing neighborly courtesy and the status of sincere requests of God's children, the translators are trying to ascribe to the parable the role of rhetoric, which, in Jesus words, makes the clearly absurd will of the embarrassed host something alien to the disciples. Therefore, in the Warsaw, Gdansk and Brest bibles we read: "*Who of you ... ?*"³, as if it was supposed to be a question directed at the disciples, and not a precise, concise – truly *medical* protocol of the state of their souls.

Whereas it is a common declarative sentence, which is probably rendered best in the Poznan Bible: "*One of you has a friend, you go to him at*

¹ Luke 11:1-4

² John 16:22-27

³ A corresponding intervention can be found in YLT and KJV (translator's note).

midnight and say . . .” No one is asking anyone anything there!¹ The question appears in the subsequent part of the discourse, where Jesus directly compares the value of the everyday fatherly prerogatives serving the well-being of the children with the value of the privileges which are bestowed on the believers by the Spirit of the Almighty.

The assertion of the Father’s will to keep the word of the promise had to have a slightly abstract dimension to the local hearers, but I think it resulted only from the fact that the word was yet to be fulfilled on the believers in the Son’s warranty for their most pressing need of personal salvation, of which none of the people gathered around the Messiah even dreamed back then – so they couldn’t get it, understanding at the same time how much it is really worth.

Therefore, ask and knock, but not like barnacles trying to borrow something from a mightier or momentarily better situated neighbor, to satisfy at all costs the narrowly conceived rules of common decency. Ask, believing that you are debtors of my Father in heaven, and this Father, unknown to you, cares for you to be free from this debt more than you.

John grasps this norm in the most concise way, writing in the Revelation² about the well-deserved rest for the *blessed dead in the Lord*, who are distinguished from many living by the fact that *their deeds follow them*, not trying to – like in the picture enclosed by the faithful Luke – awkwardly compete with the work and measure of the accomplishments of the Righteous One.

January 9th, 2012

¹ Opinions on this subject vary also in the English translations (translator’s note).

² Revelation 14:13



*Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him.
Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying,
“This man receives sinners and eats with them.”
So He told them this parable, saying, “What man among you,
if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them,
does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture
and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?
When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.
And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors,
saying to them, «Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!»
I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner
who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.
Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin,
does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?
When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors,
saying, «Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!»
In the same way, I tell you, there is joy
in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

Luke 15:1-10

GRACE AND FAITH

According to the Pharisees, there was no rescue for the sinners. Only those who didn't steal, cheat nor cast furtive glances at feminine charms could count on grace. It was unthinkable to these minions of the law that mercy was to be obtained by losers and profligates, who desired only some acquiescence to their existence – those who didn't know too well who sinned and how much, but were convinced – and held on to this hunch like to the edge of a royal robe – that the things for which they were to be blamed didn't dismiss them in the eyes of this saintly man.

The learned men weren't offended that these people were indeed thieves and frauds, but by the fact that the Messiah could and wanted to sit by them and wasn't afraid of defiling himself with their impurity. That wasn't who they were waiting for – and that's why they wanted to spew their venom on the one who was blazoning that He owned the monopoly on mercy.

Today, there aren't many who learn to fight under this Master. Christians stubbornly insist to see in the lost and found sheep a converted sinner, who allegedly *brings joy to the Father's heart by getting saved*.

But that's not what Jesus had in mind when He was telling all who were present the two twin parables about what really makes the heart of the Father and his angels glad.

Christians constantly desire to see in their Lord a sworn enemy of the Pharisees and the experts in the law, and the more they wish for this, the less reliable teachers they have and the easier they allow conceited artsy dreamers and beautiful bodies with innocent eyes to lead them by the nose.

They don't understand that this great serpent with the soul of a dove wanted, at any price, to creep into the lofty stronghold of each human heart which lacked only one lamb to have a full hundred and only one coin, which was lost through inadvertence and domestic bustle, to have

ten. For the Father rejoices only over those who seek, and the promise of eternal life and peace on earth applies only to them.

The disciples will leave their flocks in the wilderness and go looking for what is lost not so that the *numbers are right*, but to hear the choirs of angels. They will sweep the room and search every corner with the lamp of God's Word – not because *they like round numbers*, but because they want to give an account of their stewardship and see the countenance of the living God.

"Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost" ...

"Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost."¹

This is the true image of repentance. For when the sinner finds what he has lost, it's as if he has found Christ. Because He is the blind man, the prisoner, the lame, the oppressed and the thirsty. He is the one that is always ailing, suffering from hunger for faith. His dissident life is visible everywhere and always, because He is the least one, who has even already forgotten the sound of human voice and his own name, because all that He keeps hearing are the measly, grouchy words of the righteous racking their brains as to *why this bothersome sonny caused so much pain to his mother*.

"It's your own fault. You're suffering because you've sinned. Repent and everything's going to be fine – like in the old days, when we were together. Don't you remember?" That's what they'll be saying, and adjuring him in the name of all the idolatrous sanctities. There's only one thing they won't explain to him: why God loves him so much that He separated him from this group that was hateful to him – that He didn't let him satiate himself with their food, but gave light to his eyes that were blind from birth. Neither did He let him traffic his gifts, giving him instead the right to buy the most beautiful of pearls. The *righteous* won't refresh his soul either, looking him straight in the eye and saying the thing of which the Spirit convinces the saints: *"It won't be long now. Just persevere!"* For they prefer to get by without the hope for morning dew.

Unbelief demands explanations, but faith is able and willing to wait for them. It knows well who will come for this *scabby sheep*, bereft of

¹ Luke 15:6-9

its rights and self-esteem. There is only one such shepherd. No voice in his defense was issued from among the crowds gathered at the Place of the Skull. Nobody shouted: *"People, what are you doing! This is lawlessness. This man is innocent!"* This Lamb was separated, thrown, like Jonah¹, over the board of history, so that each of the ones called out by name would know who to look at and who to imitate.

Jesus abased himself more than many Christians suppose. They are too good-natured and bound by their own judgments to look into themselves and follow the example of the spendthrift son, instead of hypocritically shaking their heads over his supposed moral destitution and taking rapturous delight in the doleful scraps of reason which allegedly made him humble himself in front of his mighty parent. There was only one who got the royal ring and the best (literally: foremost!) robe – the One who could afford, at the end of his journey, when the sins of the world rested on Him, to surrender his sonship and say:

*"Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight;
I am no longer worthy to be called your son."*²

And He did it so that we wouldn't forget about the lost sheep and the coin, and about Him – about this One Mighty in love, who is able to disappear from greedy eyes³ and reveal himself to those who love and, like Him, choose what is weak, small, stupid and despised – all that is nothing in the eyes of the world, and oftentimes also in ours.

This is our God, our Jesus – a shepherd taken from the flock⁴, who on earth was driven away from the trough of the righteous⁵, so that the stray and frightened sheep could satiate themselves with his unearthly brightness⁶ and rest on his powerful arms, and by repentance and faithfulness to the Creator, who is close to them, testify to others that they know this Righteous One, who was hugged by the Father after his return not for confessing his guilt, but for fulfilling the Father's will, giving a salutary example to all those who used to lower their gaze when the friend of sinners was telling them who He is and how much He loves them.

¹ Jonah 1:1-16

² Luke 15:17-19

³ John 6:12-15; 7:2-10

⁴ 2 Samuel 7:8-16

⁵ Luke 15:14-17

⁶ 2 Corinthians 8:9; 2 Samuel 12:1-4

When the unfaithful servants and handmaidens can't sleep, they count the flocks and the money. They always have a shortage, the figures don't add up, because this *damned coin got lost somewhere*, and that *hardened sinner doesn't want to join their holier-than-thou circle* – doesn't want to accept their *consolation*. The faithful servants sleep like babies, for the Spirit of truth is with them and infallibly leads them to where the Lord's property is.

And even if the sheep gets stuck in shrubbery or falls into a pit, He will find it and pull it out, and the coin lost in the room will be lit by the desired brightness of those who, when seeking what they lost, became lost to the world, and for their Master and his good news they lost their own souls. And it is over these sinners that there will be great joy in heaven.

December 12th, 1998



Exposition

From among the images of repentance, the parable of the lost sheep and coin remains probably the clearest guidepost for those following into the footsteps of the Righteous One, at least due to the strong emphasis on the subject of conversion, which brings joy to the Father. Nevertheless, the carnal image of Christ lingering in the common awareness of Christians effectively obstructs the not too convenient thought of the rejection by the world of the outlawed *embezzlers* and *dissenters from the law* as well as the *social outcasts* – in a word, all those whose presence among the *righteous* fills the latter with a holy dread and directs against the former deadly arrows of various ostracisms.

Christ's thought, however – expanded in subsequent parables that have been altogether misunderstood until now – here as well orders the listeners of God's Word to notice a privilege, troublesome to outsiders, given to the reprieved, namely the *offenders found* by Him. The privilege is the possibility of fulfilling the Father's will revealed to them

in Christ's body. And because the way of the truth leads to the Father, it is worth for them to know what will bring Him joy, and what will make Him sad and angry.

The parable, starting with a question, was to be Jesus' answer to the holy (though not too loud and not expressed to Him) indignation of the Pharisees, caused by the shocking disregard of this rabbi and preacher for the Old Testament requirements and regulations, the limited understanding of which promoted and justified in their eyes the use of the one and only reliable criterion of judgments.

Getting along with the unclean was a serious social affront to the higher Jewish spheres and Jesus inevitably must have lost in the eyes of the *clean*, although the only *sin* that they could point out to Him was the fact that his words and ministry didn't repel from grace the people who had something on their conscience, by no means telling Him to condescend, like them, to entice souls with personal assets and greatness, for which they received glory from people.

For the motive force for this ceaseless, acrid sarcasm on the part of the learned men and the Pharisees was the jealousy for the person of the Holy One of Israel and the envy of the deference of the people as well as the real, and not just formal or factitive power over human souls, which the Master didn't bind, like they did, with a sense of guilt towards God or the burden of debts to the priest and the temple, which were even harder to pay back.

Unfortunately, the mindset of the priestly caste is predominating until the present day, even in communities pretending to be *Christ's*, where the fear of *defilement* through acquaintance with the *indecent*, and even just with the *different*, discloses only the unbelief of *Christ's servants* in salvation by grace. For only the attitude of the heart determined by the rules preached by the Shepherd of souls, and not their *beater* (the first one walks at the front, and the other one drives them where he has not the slightest wish of going), shows itself to be pure before God.

The absurdity in the understanding of the rules explicated here by Jesus comes from an intentional and unauthorized shift in emphasis of both parables, so that it becomes seemingly obvious that the Father rejoices over the found sheep and coin, whereas in reality the Father will only be proud of and rejoice over such sons and daughters who forsake what

they own on behalf of the misplaced and – as it would seem to some – expendable values, the absence of which wouldn't even be noticed by a satiated man who doesn't like to wander around in the bushes, clean up or look under his own bed.

What's striking in the endings of both the parables is exactly the fact that Jesus points to the similarity of the joy of the Father and the angels to the joy of the sinner on finding what was lost. Otherwise it would be as if the Father was leaving the sinners to themselves and rejoicing only because they find something for Him (as if He had lost something and was bossing his children around to find it), and took no pleasure in their relief and joy, seeing them following into the footsteps of his Son.

Meanwhile, even the doctrine of faith ensures that the Father is helping his children in their search – otherwise He wouldn't be Father – and He is glad when the sons and daughters look at the world through his holy eyes and demonstrate faithfulness to the commandments of their Savior, who doesn't seek sin where it's seen by a flock of righteous rams or by sumptuously feasting banqueters who don't look at the checks presented to them.

Sinners say to the witnesses of their joy: *“Rejoice, for I have found what is mine – what I myself had lost!”* And not what was lost by others. The sheep, therefore, is by no means a sinner here! It's rather the light burden of faith, if our faith is nourished by the inner flame of the Rapturous One. Jesus deliberately added a parallel picture of a woman looking for a coin precisely to avoid such a conjecture. For if human perversity would like to place the sinner on the shepherd's arms (and the long tradition of pictures of courtly idylls fosters such ideas considerably), it inevitably must surrender in the face of the perspective of consistently treating as a sinner the coin swept with a broom from under the bed – and that by a woman (oh the horror!).

Both these images are only about the personal call to derive satisfaction from the values one had lost and found thanks to Him, because only such an attitude of the heart is what Christ calls repentance that protects from death and gives glory to God the Father.

The message of these parables is exceptionally unpopular due to the fact that it turns every listener to his own ownership conditions¹, opposing the mind of the flesh which seeks gain and credit in external things which have nothing in common with the Lord's cross and his way. The blade of thought hidden here is laid bare by the Messiah in the most clear way in his speech to the Pharisees and the warnings against their hypocrisy addressed to his carefree disciples, who, even as already acclaimed teachers, carelessly swallowed concoctions not prescribed by the Physician.

Until the present day, the confessors of Christ are sometimes oblivious to the warnings and lessons of their Master. This is manifested by negligible self-awareness accompanied by peaky and passing cognitive efficiency, and, on the other hand – dubious incontinence in judgments about the co-prisoners and sky-reaching rancor to the wreaths for mean braggadocio over the heads of silent pilgrims greater than themselves, who patiently bear the heat of God's anger consuming these believers.

Christians wrongly fear that the *unconverted* sinners are much worse than the *converted* ones. They should rather think and feel differently – it's the *converted ones who are horrible and evil*, so that the earth trembles under them², but they realize that well and – if they know the voice of their Master – they are able to behave quite decently.

The contemporary passions of Christians, rash and unhealthy to the body of Christ, in *chasing away evil thoughts, driving out demons, healing hurt feelings*, and especially in preaching the gospel by spiritual trendsetters, somewhat resemble a storm in a teacup, and they proceed from the not entirely blessed (at least not by the Lord) inadvertence while reading the far-reaching visions and prophecies of the Mighty One of mercy, to whom the customary – not even Pharisaic (for that one was sometimes outstanding), but prudish – godliness usually secretly ascribes its own hellish mire, meanness, impatience and avarice, so that nobody dares to question its gravity, excellence and intransitive monopoly for its greedy, groundless dreams of power over souls.

The only hope that remains to us all is just sheep-like compliance to the very practical – not to say *womanly* – advice and guidelines of a cer-

¹ Galatians 6:4-5

² Proverbs 30:21-23

tain Great Stranger, who, even back then, showed admirable benignity both to the ones despised by the Pharisees and those who measured the value of their *spiritual assets* with the contempt for scoffers. Jesus had no *sense of humor*, because the one who is Fullness himself doesn't need to laugh at anybody. But sometimes it happens that, out of his will and grace, the earth is visited by such *pranksters* at the sight of whom both groups tremble, because in their company the steel of the heavenly armory rings in their ears, reminding them of the one and only thing that will never be forgiven by the Father¹.

It would be better for them to see the one Light, because it can dawn on anyone, and the Father of Lights loves and goes out with his lamp to search high and low even for the experts in the law, although He knows well that not many of them will hear his voice, resounding in heaven, but quiet on earth – where it is the voice of the poor in spirit who passionately seek in Him that which they themselves always lack to have a full hundred and a full ten.

¹ Luke 12:8-10



*It happened that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him closely.
And there in front of Him was a man suffering from dropsy.
And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying,
"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" But they kept silent.
And He took hold of him and healed him, and sent him away.
And He said to them, "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?"*
[...]

*"A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many;
and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited,
«Come; for everything is ready now.» But they all alike began to make excuses.
The first one said to him, «I have bought a piece of land
and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.»
Another one said, «I have bought five yoke of oxen,
and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.»
Another one said, «I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.»
And the slave came back and reported this to his master.
Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave,
«Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city
and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.»
And the slave said, «Master, what you commanded has been done,
and still there is room.» And the master said to the slave,
«Go out into the highways and along the hedges,
and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled.
For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.»"*

Luke 14:1-24

THE KING'S GUESTS

There is no doubt that a certain man visited the house of a Jewish ruler only on this one day of his life. He wouldn't have any reason to cross this lofty threshold neither before, nor after it. Jesus was moved by his faith, like He was moved by the faith of the Canaanite mother¹ and the Roman soldier² who recognized in Him a servant of the Lord.

This time it didn't behoove the Pharisees to express loud indignation at the miracle of healing, again performed shamelessly on the Sabbath. After all, they wanted to honor the great teacher and miracle worker, and it wouldn't be nice to admonish the guest to *show some restraint with his goodness*. Jesus knew perfectly well that it wasn't the magnanimity of the guests that made them gloss over his question: "*Is it lawful to heal on a Sabbath, or is it not?*" That's why He helped them to ponder in their hearts whether the father they knew would be at least as good to them as they were to their sons and oxen on the day of rest³.

Our Lord must have felt somewhat like the prophet Jeremiah, thrown into the muddy well belonging to the priests of the old order on the day when it had long been clear that this order wouldn't stand before the invader. Back then, the corrupt and cowardly governor of the Babylonian king was moved by the intercession of an Ethiopian eunuch, who noticed that the princes had sentenced to death a man who had been warning of destruction⁴.

This time it also escaped the notice of the rulers that the Messiah knew the will of the Father better than they did, because He loved and didn't cast off from grace those whom they had despised. And that just this Father was showing them the truth with the eyes of the man suffering from dropsy who had trusted the Righteous One. Once more the patience of the Pharisees proved to be almost admirable. Certainly, nothing could have testified of their humility and abasement more strongly than

¹ Matthew 15:22-28

² Matthew 8:5-13

³ Matthew 14:1-6

⁴ Jeremiah 38:6-13

the fact that they swallowed another parable of the wise man . . . But they didn't chew on it, didn't understand it. For although they received this unearthly guest, they didn't care who sent Him and what for.

If in one of our houses the guest of honor started to admonish the regulars that they didn't set apart his due place, it would be his last visit in this circle. Christians, however, try with all their might to forgive Jesus for behaving like a redneck devoid of the least bit of savoir-faire at a feast to which He was invited. *After all, He was the incarnate God and the Lord of the Sabbath, and it's even fitting for the Lord and King to reprimand and teach the Pharisaic scum the rules of propriety.*

Still, when we read this parable cursorily, we ourselves feel awkward, as if an old, embittered beak was giving us one more chance to improve our reprehensible behavior. As if the Master really had nothing better to do than sending to the tail end all the rascals who care about true greatness.

*"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,
and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*¹

This verse is being unconsciously used by parents teaching their children manners, men seducing and humiliating women and all the rulers who lose their sense of humor when the usurped power slips away from their hands. It is being invoked by great and delusive teachers who think that they are extraordinarily humble when they preach callous morals at the fallen humanity: *"Be good and you'll go to heaven."*

Sometimes we are not far from explaining to ourselves in such a way the meaning of the words of someone who came to save us from ourselves. For it doesn't take much to trample the germinating sprouts of wheat and to stifle the cry of a child.

But it is exactly such understanding of this core principle of God's Kingdom that was condemned by the Apostle, who warned the faithful against the people who delight in self-abasement and worship of angels². It's the false piety of these empty windbags and deceivers that was torn at with the apostolic claw in the letter to Titus, when he quoted their own prophet:

¹ Luke 14:11

² Colossians 2:16-23

*"Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."*¹

For everyone who wants to deserve grace, buries it with his own hands – the one who doesn't want to please the Father, but to buy Him.

Faith, however, even though it yields to the people who are disinclined to its sources, doesn't yield to a liar. It knows no obstacles – it is like the flame of a candle sheltered by a powerful hand; it always goes up. Faith always shoots spot-on, for it has just one aim – the salvation of the soul. And it was this beauty of faith that the most beautiful of men was showing to the envious and mendacious priests. It was this man suffering from dropsy whom He ascribed the place of honor at the wedding table, just as to everyone whose destitution, blindness and disability calls out to the heavens for help.

The first in the eyes of the Righteous One isn't the one who adulates the King, but the one who asks Him². For it's not the great gifts that are held in esteem by the wedding guests, but the great, unassuaged desire of the soul – this lovesickness, which tramples on and tears through all that's holy to see the Holy One. It's this love that saps the lofty banks, steals hearts and fills them to overflowing, because it knows that by itself it has nothing but what has been given to it.

The glow of this Galilean peasant's torch was trampled by human feet and smothered by human hands. On that day, the Jews took care that justice would take its course before they would celebrate the day of Sabbath. Jesus turned out to be such a convenient offender that the customary breaking of bones proved to be unnecessary. He was too exhausted.

The festive feast took place without this blasphemer, without this repulsive creature who dared to call for the right of grace for the sinners. He was condescending in such a disgusting way that it was impossible to listen to Him or to look at Him. He never had enough. He was satisfied neither with lunches at the rich people's and rulers' houses, nor with the place behind a pulpit. He didn't even like the blessings and the tears of the daughters of Jerusalem accompanying Him to the place of execution.

They could, after all, forgive Him for healing, performing miracles, even for being wiser than all of them. But there was one thing that these

¹ Titus 1:10-16

² Proverbs 25:6-11

guardians of public order could not forgive Him: that the god to whom they dedicated their lives was not the God who sent Him. They could not deny this disparity – He was different and it was glaring. And nowadays everyone who is trying to obscure this brightness is a servant of falsehood. It's better for him if he doesn't know it¹. Otherwise he takes a stand at the side of those to whom the death of the Righteous One isn't enough.

This vast disparity between their own destitution and his purity was something that the murderers of the Savior could not deny. So they denied not only the law of Moses – we all break this law unawares, like sleepwalkers on a moonlit night, oblivious to the places appointed for rest – they denied and stifled within them the remnant of reasonable will which waits and asks whether the one God could be God without wanting to be closer to the people He created.

The Pharisees couldn't doubt the greatness of the Son of Man. So they contested and trampled his divine dignity and humanity, which from then on were to become the only measure of credibility of God's messengers. He who makes himself equal with God can only be a hellhound, and at least an unbalanced lunatic – in the opinion of every evil and greedy piety which enters without knocking and grabs someone else's goods.

But the faithful resist it, for they know that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh², and the devil, even though he eagerly seeks for the flesh³, doesn't care about it, just like any human lust which gives in order to derive profit and to dazzle like New Year's fireworks – it will go out before it falls to the ground.

One of the guests fired off such a firework, thinking that he would honor the dignified guest with pompous words:

*"Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God."*⁴

These words were supposed to be like a delicacy or a toast to the insubordinate, but prominent anointed one, who unreasonably stood pat instead of humbly and thankfully joining the honorable company of the blessed.

¹ 2 Peter 2:20-22

² 1 John 4:2-6

³ Galatians 4:17; 6:12-13

⁴ Luke 14:12-15

The sagacious newcomer, however, didn't swallow those sweetmeats, with which Christians heedlessly stuff themselves today, receiving together with them the payment for adultery¹. He knew well that those who would pay for his concession would be all those who, aware of their own powerlessness, can only count on the Powerful One, those whose disability and inner emptiness calls for the Fullness.

If He yielded and joined the toast to the blessed, everyone who had been healed by Him would read in the gospel that his benefactor was a scumbag and a ratter. Or rather he wouldn't – because there wouldn't be any gospel. But Jesus behaved as He should have, because He didn't even show contempt to those hypocrites who were running away from grace and defending their apostasy with cheap flattery and an underhanded blade of accusations of unfaithfulness and duplicity.

The apostle Paul attended a good school. This expert in the law and headstrong blasphemer ate from the Lord's hand like a docile puppy. He became a simpleton and a fool to the beautiful and wise – to all those his Master died for. Even to those who became swollen with the water of salvation instead of learning to swim in it.

He understood that the great one always waits for one greater than himself, for the mighty God of mercy rejoices over great faith and grants a distinguished place only to this daughter of destitution, just as He granted it to the Ethiopian eunuch who once pulled the great prophet from the pit of destruction² and to Rahab, the harlot from Jericho, who helped the Israelite scouts wielding the promise of the Lord of heaven and earth³.

God doesn't wait until his messengers condescend to do what they should, for He knows that if He staked too much on human will, even the biggest fish would eventually choke on know-it-all Jonahs⁴, and the inhabitants of big cities wouldn't live to hear any news from Him.

God doesn't bestow wreaths on apostles, prophets and even the greatest evangelists, but on widows, orphans and strangers. Otherwise it would be as if He was rewarding himself for his great gifts and thanking people for graciously accepting them. He simply sends his servants to testify of the truth and have in front of their eyes not a mirror and

¹ Ezekiel 16:30-34

² Jeremiah 39:16-18

³ Joshua 2:3-8; 6:20-25

⁴ Jonah 4:2-4

their own greatness, but the greatness of those who trust and wait for the Righteous One.

Only such greatness allows itself to be knocked down, reviled and ridiculed, for it says to itself and to others:

"I only have his Word; He gave it to me, and I believe Him. I'm not faithful, but I know the One who is. I sometimes happen to say something false, but He never does. Sometimes the weakness and foolishness of my neighbors amuse me, but He never mocks, because He isn't an errand boy, but the man of mercy, Spirit of truth and Comforter of all those who don't feel like laughing at all."

Today, when great gifts corrupt people, and the arguments are often about who is the greatest, it is worth it to recall this sole hierarchy recognized by the Holy One of Israel, for the unfaithful servants are threatened by depths of oblivion and shame. And, on the day of judgment, they won't be helped by the tassels at the ends of the robes which were not tailor-made for them and the bells that make the tax collectors and harlots flee.

The old Apostle didn't boast in front of his son of the multitudes he served, but of the faith that he kept¹. But even today the three expressions that are salutary to the soul: *I'm sorry, please* and *thank you* don't come easy to the faithful. For they are usually uttered by men who know God, and not gods who know about men.

January 10th, 1999

¹ 2 Timothy 4:7-18

*Exposition*

Christ's call for hospitality towards the poor, crippled, lame and blind preserves its disquieting sting until today, even if the hosts gladly welcome the needy at their door. The mere thought that it would be befitting to earnestly meet even a part of the needs reported by the faithful has to fill many spiritual guides with understandable dread.

Whereas it is still unlikely that what Jesus had in mind was that his Church was to become a charity or a poorhouse, especially that the tone of his admonition directed to the host was personal¹, and its aim was rather to expose the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who were greedily prying into his undeniable greatness. After all, inviting the Messiah to the table had to have some significance to them – but not the significance that the Almighty would wish for.

The Pharisees by no means considered themselves blind or obviously lacking anything². Their goal was rather to show to Jesus a conventional favor, which, according to them, was due to everyone who referred to the books of the law of Moses and God's oracles like they did. Therefore, they measured their guest with the measure of their own salaries and their own glory, so the thought of the servitude of his will towards the needy deeply offended their hardened hearts.

Jesus' speech to the representatives of the priestly caste was simple and offhand. The lucrative respectability of their office was to be the sole remuneration for their limp, but formidable command-and-quota piety, so none of them qualified as blessed in his eyes. Jesus gave the sole reason for which they could consider themselves as such: it was the utter inability to reciprocate their decidedly conditional, and, to that, scantily measured gifts and sacrifices³.

¹ Luke 14:12

² John 9:39-41; 15:20-25

³ Luke 14:14

This rule was completely alien to them, because it didn't honor their privileged status of *Abrahamic princes*¹. *"How much, after all, can you be giving to the poor? Will they appreciate it?"* Using a simple allusion, Jesus tried to make them understand their own whimpering misery as the gatekeepers of knowledge, which clutched the testimony of God's generosity in its fists, so that their own image of life and faith wouldn't lose all its colors and clarity altogether. *It is good to receive, but even better to give*. The Pharisees were only able to carry out transactions behind the backs of their flock, duped with lies. Their consciousness was only a consciousness of external threats, surrounding their holier-than-thou eminence with their filth.

Today this clear gospel image of the brutal and cynical sacrilege is generally obscured exactly by a conviction identical to the Pharisaic one – that Christ was after all a servant of sin, since He met sinners halfway – an unjust servant, because He didn't appreciate the merits of his earthly hosts who graciously received Him, despite the fact that this alleged usurper didn't deserve it at all, stubbornly taking the side of the blind, lame and poor who, in their eyes, were rightly punished by God.

To this very day, Christian mentality has been constrained by the concern that Jesus' merits for those who want to see the Father's face aren't enough. What distinctly attests to that is the emphasis put by the teachers precisely there, where the sole criterion of the credibility of this conviction should be the inner power of the message and a solid moral backbone, which are the fruit of faithfulness to the commandments of the Righteous One.

For people want to be healthy, beautiful and rich. They don't want to have reasons for complaints and concerns, but it doesn't necessarily mean that they want to be where He is. As for those who want to get there, it is absolutely essential that they must come to their own, and not a borrowed conviction that God loves them not for repaying Him with parties for the poor, but because in faith they let Him measure and fill with his wealth their own poverty, disability and blindness. For only this way they give Him back the glory that was stolen from Him.

¹ John 8:33

The common notions of God's generosity are almost a parody of his real generosity – they are a little like throwing confetti on the heads of the guests who are entirely satisfied with the splendor of their own glory and the bliss of the feast, inclining to lordly gestures – by no means farm work. So it's only the great supper that nobody crowds into, because it's given for free – the worse the guest and the more deplorable the condition of his soul, the better, because there the weather doesn't favor the rich, but those with whom on earth hardly anybody shook hands looking them straight in the eye. And that's because their eyes were staring at the Invisible One, who, in his unfathomable mercy, compelled them¹ to receive his graces, surrounding with his glory their ceaseless: *"Please, Lord!"*

For this weird man said something so stunning that until today people prefer to talk about Him than to listen to Him. He just said – out of the blue:

*"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."*²

It's really still an offer that is too fishy to the poor pretending to be rich, slaves who pass for masters, the lost who assure everyone around that they have found, and to the blind who claim that there's nothing wrong with their eyes. Their hospitality will never serve themselves, because angels have good eyesight and they recognize idolaters from far away, blinding with their brightness the haughty eyes and tangling the lying tongues of those who excuse themselves from the great feast with the responsibility for what they own³.

¹ Luke 14:23; Psalms 68:19

² Luke 11:9-10

³ Luke 14:16-20

*Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them,
“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother
and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life,
he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross
and come after Me cannot be My disciple.
For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower,
does not first sit down and calculate the cost
to see if he has enough to complete it?
Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish,
all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying,
«This man began to build and was not able to finish.»
Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle,
will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough
with ten thousand men to encounter the one
coming against him with twenty thousand?
Or else, while the other is still far away,
he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.
So then, none of you can be My disciple
who does not give up all his own possessions.
Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless,
with what will it be seasoned?
It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out.
He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

Luke 14:25-35

ENEMIES OF THE CROSS

The prophet's call resounded at the bank of the Jordan¹. There were two reasons for which people were coming to get baptized in the river: the first one was to clear glory-greedy consciences² and the second one was to be ready for the coming of the Messiah³. To those who came for the former reason, it seemed like the washing of their bodies would keep them from God's wrath. Those who came for the latter one wanted the prophet to remind them who they were and what God expected of them. The former wanted to have their hands clean, the latter wanted to live.

The same people would soon after surround John's cousin, wondering in their spirits whether what Jesus was telling them to do was little or much⁴. John ordered the sinners to conduct themselves decently, but Jesus didn't bless the righteous, but rather on the contrary – He put his seal under all the requirements of law and justice, tightening the screws on all haughty highbrows⁵.

The multitudes would have dwindled soon⁶ if the anointed announcement of the Kingdom of God had not been accompanied by miraculous healings. Doubtless the Herald himself seemed to some an unbalanced madman when He decreed:

*"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea."*⁷

For then he would grasp that it is cruel to weigh others down with unbearable burdens⁸.

"If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye,

¹ Luke 3:3-18

² Matthew 3:7-9; Isaiah 24:18;
John 8:33-44

³ Luke 3:10

⁴ Matthew 19:14-27; Mark 9:38

⁵ Matthew 5:17-48

⁶ John 6:66; 8:31,33,59

⁷ Mark 9:42-48

⁸ Matthew 23:4-31

*than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell,
where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."*

According to this itinerant preacher, nothing was as urgent as repentance¹ and as fatal as obstacles on a level road. That's why the leg and the arm were to be axed if they bothered one in the narrow gate of the Kingdom.

Nowadays, little is expected of the Savior – mere miracles, and often only that He wouldn't impose himself too impudently with his inhuman rules, which are usually impossible to be understood and applied by any respectable citizen. *"How could I not condemn myself for being drawn to women, for fancying only what I can steal, for feeling like kicking this prig, raising a row at home or in another holy place?!"*

These recreant dilemmas are shared by everyone until they are warmed by grace or until the Pharisaic leaven completely consumes their bland, acrimonious bigotry², which will be a stumbling block to the little ones – those who will take them at their word and believe also that in order to go to heaven, one needs to be nice³. If you tried to convince some that the Lord cut these dilemmas with a single sweep of a sword, they would think you've got a screw loose.

"How can I gouge out my eye only because I make such a laudable effort to turn from these lecherous types leafing through pornographic magazines? How can I cut off this hand, which I restrained from stealing so many times in order to bring You joy? Am I to cut off my ear, which I stop from listening every time my brother is swearing like a trooper?

Am I to chop off this foot, which I so solemnly promised to never again set in the house of this idolater and jealous man?⁴ Wouldn't you appreciate my effort, with which I'm smiling at this homosexual or at that one, who robbed and offended me?

I'm ashamed of You, Lord, and of your words. I guess you want to hurt me and strip me of my skin, and take away my last coat⁵, and with it the last scrap of hope that these greedy, defiant criminals⁶,

¹ Luke 13:1-5

² Mark 8:14-21

³ Isaiah 36:6

⁴ Romans 2:17-25

⁵ Luke 6:29

⁶ Luke 15:2

perverts and heretics would at last be converted and come to me, for they would recognize that I loved them; my intentions were all good¹ and I wanted to snatch them from the fire of hell which they deserved.

Oh, if only I taught them², they would never forget about You, Lord! They would be wonderful, great and humble people like myself. They would serve You like dogs³ and they would never even think about anything for themselves, they wouldn't have defiled themselves with any of the abominable, selfish transgressions that push them away from You⁴."

Those who think that they know the Lord⁵ are the ones most easily forgetting his orders and conditions of peace heralded by the messenger of the angry Father. Until their deep sleep and blindness leaves them⁶, they will be divided by a chasm⁷ from those pointed out by the wise man's words near Caesarea Philippi:

"Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."⁸

They won't taste, won't experience death⁹, won't escape the fowler's snare sooner than they see the light for the anguish of their souls¹⁰.

For it's only this obstinacy of faith bereft of itself that will be acknowledged and rewarded by the Righteous One¹¹. Only to this flagrant hatred of the world, people and one's own soul will the Teacher show himself one day, and she – the adamant and daring daughter of destitution – will say:

"I trust You, Lord¹². Only speak to me, please don't keep silent! For greed is the emblem of the poor¹³, vehemence jostles the tables of the merchants and the moneychangers¹⁴, and God only knows

¹ Isaiah 31:2-8

² Romans 2:19-24

³ Galatians 4:17; 6:12-15

⁴ Luke 11:5-7; 15:29-30

⁵ 1 John 2:3-4

⁶ Matthew 13:15; 2 Corinthians 3:12-17

⁷ Luke 16:26

⁸ Matthew 16:24-28

⁹ Hebrews 2:9; 1 Peter 2:3-21

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 3:18; Isaiah 53:9-12

¹¹ Romans 9:1-3

¹² Isaiah 12:1-4

¹³ Matthew 15:22-28

¹⁴ Galatians 2:14; John 2:14-19

that jealousy guards its own as the apple of its eye. If I weren't as cunning and ruthless as Jacob¹ or Jael, the wife of Heber², how could I have noticed the grace that outsmarted me and fettered me with an easy yoke³? Who would have taught me the tricks – not avaricious, but salutary – from which only faith gets out in one piece, like a certain young man, whose nakedness didn't prevent him from escaping from the hands of the executioners⁴? And if I hadn't had even one really bad thought, what would have reminded me that I'm in a war? Whose hand would have swiped at the enemy? Finally, if I hadn't experienced the charm and submission of a woman, from where would the words of the Bride have reached me:

*«I am my beloved's,
And his desire is for me»⁵?”*

The Father calculated the cost of his construction well⁶, much better than the great builders of the earth, whose tongues are getting tangled⁷. They are unable to predict whether they won't hire some canny rascal who steals cement for his shanty at night⁸ and doesn't pay what is right to the workers who toil in the sweat of their brows.

Like on the day of judgment, when the mocking around Noah's ark quickly stopped⁹, there won't be anyone left to make fun of the mighty tower¹⁰, for the only cement of its living stones¹¹ will be love, which the faithful took possession of by faith, giving by that glory to God the Father and the Son.

There won't be any more *fans of the truth*¹², noisy and buzzing like mosquitoes, nor good-natured liars with sand gritting between their teeth¹³; not a trace will be left of those who set a table for Fortune¹⁴ and promise freedom to others, even though they themselves are slaves of corruption¹⁵. Who say:

¹ Genesis 25:28-33; 27:19-20

² Judges 5:24-31

³ Jeremiah 20:7; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10;
Philippians 3:12-13

⁴ Mark 14:49-52

⁵ Song of Songs 7:2-11

⁶ Luke 14:28-30

⁷ Genesis 11:3-9

⁸ Isaiah 28:14-18; 30:25

⁹ Hebrews 11:7; Matthew 24:37-44

¹⁰ Luke 14:30

¹¹ 1 Peter 2:4-12

¹² Isaiah 33:17-19

¹³ 1 John 1:6-10; 2:4-22

¹⁴ Isaiah 65:11-15

¹⁵ 2 Peter 2:17-22

*"Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it;
And let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near
And come to pass, that we may know it!"¹*

Every part of this extraordinary building², surrounded by God's glory, will be thankful to the Almighty: not for having seen³, but for having taken Him at his word⁴. For there it will forget the eyes of the peepers – cold, suspicious and treacherous as daggers⁵, which were spying on its childlike trust in the Uncreated One, calling each human frailty sin and unbelief a frailty.

There, fathers will forget about the salutary hatred towards their children, husbands towards their wives, brothers towards their sisters⁶ – about that hatred which isn't an exorbitant price for perfection nor a bar set too high for too ambitious jockeys, but an absolute condition of peace between God and people, which was paid for by the Son⁷.

For up there a measure pressed down and shaken together won't be received by those who *want to know what faith and truth is*, but those who are faithful and true⁸. And when they must, they don't hesitate to seem like enemies to their neighbors⁹, because they know the Son who also didn't hesitate to convince his compatriots, whose eyes were fixed on Him, that it is impossible to escape God's wrath by patching up one's own righteousness with scraps of a new garment¹⁰ and bribing the Father with it. For in his eyes the great ones aren't those who *carry the King*, but those who listen to Him – because such are carried by Him.

When in the kingdom of Israel the son rose against his father¹¹, nobody would have convinced the rebels gathered around him that king David was flawless. Certainly not everyone believed that the handsome Absalom had clean hands, wondering whether the judgment of son upon father was a judgment of a righteous one. But when God-ordained power becomes the object of political game, nobody reckons with the costs – and those are no smaller than blood.

¹ Isaiah 5:18-24

² Isaiah 28:21; John 6:27-30

³ 1 Peter 1:6-9; Romans 8:25;
Hebrews 2:8

⁴ Matthew 8:8-9; John 1:50; 20:29

⁵ Galatians 2:3-5

⁶ Matthew 10:21-35

⁷ Galatians 2:20; Romans 7:15-17;

Isaiah 40:10; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15

⁸ Revelation 3:14-18

⁹ Galatians 4:15-16; 2 Corinthians 12:15-20

¹⁰ Luke 5:32-36

¹¹ 2 Samuel 15:1-12

This time twenty thousand people¹ were devoured by the forest of Ephraim, having staved off God's anger at the anointed and his divided people, to whom the son of Jesse was to be a shepherd and not a butcher². Atrocious murder³ befell also the only rebel over whom the great father raised a lament:

*"O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!
Would I had died instead of you,
O Absalom, my son, my son!"*⁴

David's faithful warriors weren't offended by fatherly grief, so on the day of the crushing victory they were entering the city by stealth, like an army that is covered in shame because it fled in battle⁵. They knew that they were fighting by the king's side also so that they would be able to enjoy their own sons and daughters, and that for the king this hope has faded.

Only the murderer of the royal son was insulted by the love which on the day of God's glory the judge and prophet of Israel showed those who hated him, simultaneously showing hatred towards those who loved him⁶. For this vengeful lackey and assassin didn't even think that it was God himself who came to the aid of the divided kingdom for the sake of his faithful, though sinful servant, David. And that it was to Him, the living God, and not to people, that the king owed gratitude, as well as every survivor of the fratricidal war.

Before the battle, in the hearts of these brave soldiers there was but one prayer: *"God save the King!"* And when the king wanted to go out with their ranks, he heard from their lips an unanimous answer sounding in attentive ears like the most beautiful confession of faith:

*"You should not go out; for if we indeed flee,
they will not care about us; even if half of us die,
they will not care about us.
But you are worth ten thousand of us;*

¹ 2 Samuel 18:7

² 2 Samuel 11:14-25

³ 2 Samuel 18:14-17

⁴ 2 Samuel 18:27-33

⁵ 2 Samuel 19:1-3

⁶ 2 Samuel 19:4-7

*therefore now it is better
that you be ready to help us from the city.”¹*

The king didn’t have to go out from the city, because the spirit of faith didn’t abandon his faithful ones, allowing them to rout the enemy. But these people didn’t – even for a moment – lose sight of the design of the envious rebel who was advised by a traitor, greedy for his own glory². They knew that murderous hatred aims at the head, and not the heart, because fatherly anguish of the soul is alien to it. So they expected dishonor and defeat, knowing that they weren’t fighting for their own honor and life, but for the victory of God’s righteousness.

Absalom, son of peace, beautiful without blemish³, hung on a tree between heaven and earth⁴, but a treacherous blow reached him against his father’s will⁵. His death calmed the small consciences.

The people didn’t sense yet that the death and dishonor of the royal son who brought God’s wrath on himself a thousand years later⁶ would deliver its witnesses only because they would never forget about the wonderful countenance and will of that Prince of Peace who, like Absalom, became an enemy of his Father – but not because He desired power over men’s souls, but because He had it by the command of his parent⁷, to save those who know the Father’s heart.

But the measure of the cost of this command⁸ wasn’t to be David’s lonely grief in the upper room over the one he loved, but who – like himself – was unrighteous. For this time the dove of a clean Spirit rested on the anointed one coming up from the waters of Jordan, who fulfilled all righteousness not for nothing⁹, and no deceit was found in his mouth. And even though He was like a lamb without blemish, human wickedness counted Him among transgressors, who are rightly¹⁰ punished in this vale by the earthly servants of justice.

But this unearthly newcomer announced his hour of distress¹¹, in which the ruler of this world blinded the judges and executioners of grace¹²

¹ 2 Samuel 18:2-4

² 2 Samuel 15:12; 16:23; 17:1-3

³ 2 Samuel 14:25

⁴ 2 Samuel 18:9-10; Galatians 3:13-14;
John 12:32-33

⁵ 2 Samuel 14:28-32; 18:5,12

⁶ 1 Peter 1:10-13

⁷ John 10:14-18; Matthew 28:17-18

⁸ Jeremiah 9:1-2; 10:18-21

⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:14-20

¹⁰ Romans 8:3-4

¹¹ Luke 9:44-45

¹² Luke 22:53

with his powerful might and terrified the hot-headed, soon-to-be eternally grateful witnesses of the glorious resurrection¹.

And He did that so that the cattle, reconciled with God by his own blood, wouldn't kick too much under the saving command of the shepherd of souls nor eagerly sign pacts written on oxhide, especially with their own blood – because it's not the Holy Father who seeks it. For his yoke really is easy, and his burden light².

Christians readily and passionately judge human affairs, but they are reluctant to think about the heavenly ones. And when they admire the great building, nothing draws them to it³, and when they see peace negotiations, they rejoice only because they're finished, and not because they saved their lives that were hanging by a thread. Though they confess with their mouths⁴, in their hearts they don't believe that the foundation bearing the Father's seal⁵ and the Chief of giants of faith are worth due appreciation⁶.

But the faithful, alive, but already dead and raptured in spirit, will repeat their credo after David's warriors, for they know that the Spirit of the Lord will come from the city⁷ to the aid of those who don't renounce bad thoughts too hastily (because otherwise some of these desperadoes could end up without any thoughts and the suicidal kind are sometimes among the better ones); they don't banish foolishness, for a fool will be welcomed more readily than a wise man⁸; they don't drive anger away and don't pretend to be more patient than they are, for who would shut up the empty babblers who have taken possession of everything but God's love.

They will count the money and measure the time – not out of stinginess or greed, but in order to be able to give an account of their own, and not someone else's stewardship. They will look with an angelic smile into the eyes of the bigots to whom their pride is an eyesore, for they don't know the source of their undying boasting⁹.

¹ Mark 14:31; Acts 2:29-37

² Isaiah 28:12; Jeremiah 23:32-40;
Matthew 11:27-30

³ James 2:19

⁴ Isaiah 29:11-14

⁵ 2 Timothy 2:15-19

⁶ Jeremiah 9:11-15; 1 Peter 2:7-8

⁷ Galatians 4:22-27

⁸ 2 Corinthians 12:11

⁹ Galatians 6:14; 2 Corinthians 1:12

And in the same way that they won't renounce the Lord's words¹, they won't renounce any of these *unsightly things* that sometimes destroy the peace of their souls². They will deny themselves³ and say:

"Lord please, put it right, sort it out a bit, because it's getting all mixed up in my head and I'm starting to feel nauseous. What am I to tell this conceited orphan whose head is so full of chaff, bound with a conviction that suffering makes one noble, and if that wasn't enough, has no idea about nobility? What should I say to this wriggler who's afraid of his own shadow and is hair-splitting, thinking that he's exhibiting humility? What am I to give to this widow who's speaking about Jesus in such a way as if He was her Lord and nobody else's? How do I appeal to this joker⁴ who's fettering himself with bonds and tightening the noose on his neck? How am I to smile at this dignitary who shook everyone's hand, except for the prophet's? Who will tell me of your faithfulness, if in the fall I won't see a leaf that stuck to the wet windowpane, and in the winter those two titmice pecking a side of pork fat outside my window? Whose legs will assure me that not everyone lost their heads and they're persistently waiting until You come? If You hadn't told the beggar a tale of the great tower and great defused peril, who would have convinced him that it is well to hate one's own soul, because it won't show the way to the erring, and thousands of its ideas won't stand for your purpose that gathers together into one the scattered children of God and exposes to ridicule⁵ the incoherent efforts of pathetic thieves of your glory, smeared all over with the mud of unbelief⁶? Who would have pointed to him these eyes, embarrassed and surprised at their own boldness, and that angelic prison slang of faith known to the Lord's servants?"

When a hundred such human questions converge at one place and time and a tear is starting to form under the eyelid, the open ear hears a short conversation:

¹ 1 John 2:22-23; Galatians 2:17-21

² 1 Peter 4:12-13

³ 2 Corinthians 4:1-2; 1 Corinthians 3:18;
Luke 23:40-42

⁴ Isaiah 28:22

⁵ Colossians 2:15

⁶ Isaiah 25:10-12; Luke 16:14-15

"What will you give me, Lord?"

"I'll give you myself."

"What am I to give to them?"

"Give Me to them."

"Isn't that too little, too much?"

"That will do, for I am the measure of all things."

When all the thoughts of human hearts will be cleansed by the Judgment, only the matter of who pulled whom out of the mire and in whose name, and whether he took payment for that, will be of any consequence, and not whether he had a smooth face, a noble soul or whether he was *more blessed*. Then it will turn out that all the passionate prophecies and hallucinations, miracles, healings and signs¹ weren't worth in the Lord's eyes as much as the implacable resistance of those who repelled onslaughts at the gate², drawing the overwhelming enemy forces to themselves.

And the enemy would flood them with his kindness, convince that *it is unseemly to be such an ungrateful, confirmed egoist, uncompromising and true son of his accursed and forgotten mother*³; *one has to have understanding for the people, know their needs, expectations and habits. One doesn't need to call them by their names, looking straight into their eyes – it is enough to have good intentions, be tolerant, nice, useful, dexterous, green and merry and not be in anyone's way. And as for faithfulness, it is enough to be faithful to oneself. The rest will go just fine* ... He only didn't say where it would go⁴.

The Lord wanted to have disciples, but He sometimes has toadies, swots and immaculate damsels, whose wayward mothers are pleased only with the fact that their sons didn't bring home a single reprimand for bad behavior, and their little daughters didn't wring the doll's neck and didn't cruelly ridicule any muff.

The bonfires of human souls aren't there to take burning coals out of them, but in order to warm oneself and roast sausage⁵. And it's this

¹ Micah 3:5-12

² Isaiah 28:5-6; Amos 5:10-15

³ Song of Songs 6:4-12

⁴ Matthew 7:12-16

⁵ In 2010 I also renounced my native culinary tradition, profiting from the results of the research and commonsense suggestions of professor T. Colin Campbell. For that reason, sausage is no longer my favorite treat (author's note).

fire that Jesus Christ, anguished by sorrow and concern for the Father's property¹, came to cast upon the earth².

As for his disciples, He didn't make uniformed firefighters of them, but cunning firebrands³ who would allow others to push them around even in court⁴, but only to make the thoughtless rioters realize that they don't have to be ashamed of any thought or feeling, but only of the unbelief that doesn't cover them⁵.

April 12th, 1999



Exposition

To this day, the truth about the cross is surrounded by a strange dimness that favors the emerging of various phantasms that effectively prevent the understanding of this elementary sign of spiritual reality that was to help the faithful in fulfilling the will of Jesus of Nazareth.

Had the Master wrestled his cross from the hands of Simon of Cyrene⁶, ensuring everyone around that *He can afford this last effort in his life at any rate*, Christians wouldn't have too many reasons to wonder why, in that otherwise important matter⁷, He didn't give them a personal example. The testimony of the evangelists, however, convinces us that the self-denial of the Son of God had to consist in something less spectacular than a march to the place of execution, exhausting the physical strength of the convict who was carrying on his back an instrument of torture commonly known at that time.

Unfortunately, the passionate and greedy inclination of Christians to identify with the fate and physical sufferings of Christ doesn't go hand in hand with attentive reflection on the motives of his unexampled subjection to the executioners. The faithful also lose sight of the sense and aim of this evident repudiation of his own glory by the messenger of God

¹ Mark 3:5; John 11:33-35;
Matthew 26:37-38

² Luke 12:49-53

³ Obadiah 18

⁴ Acts 23:1-9

⁵ Isaiah 50:4-11

⁶ Luke 23:26

⁷ Luke 14:27

the Father. Jesus, however, knowingly denied all the rights due to someone who considers himself a king, priest and master – in a word, someone great in the eyes of this world. He became nothing¹ unto the end, and that exclusively for the sake of his Father's love towards the elect. The very word *to deny, to renounce oneself* is a purely technical term denoting *rebutting, questioning, negating* the fact that one is who he considers himself to be. Peter used it in his sermon to the Jews², stating their guilt of *denying* ties with the captive Jesus.

Self-denial isn't, therefore, a term denoting a vague and grueling practice distressing the body and soul in expectation of a reward, but the other way round, a condition of obtaining freedom and relief in the distress and doubts of a divided soul³ (something like a return to a reality *suggested* by someone with a credible measure in their hand), which, of itself, doesn't even know whether it loves or hates.

The simplest exposition of this absolute rule of discipleship is Paul's declaration in the letter to Galatians, where the Apostle confesses his faith in the foolishness of God, stating that *it is no longer he who lives, but Christ*⁴, who inhabited his body, dead to sin and made alive by faith.

And one of the more vulgar (I see no important reason to shun such here) approximations of the absolute need to submit to this rule, which could successfully serve my contemporaries, is for instance the human fright at the dictum of the messenger of the mafia, declaring to the recipient of the *message* very plainly: *"You're dead"* (because, let's say, this wretch didn't envisage that his life calculations are in a slight conflict with the calculations of the godfather). In other words, it sounds somewhat like this: *"You have nothing. You are nobody. You know nothing and can't do anything."* A voluntary acceptance of this point of view⁵ as one's own results in the powerful warranty of the Almighty.

Jesus has nothing for those who aren't able to admit that they hate (don't know) themselves, and even Christ, according to the flesh⁶ (for the blasphemies against the Son were to be forgiven⁷), because his personal mandates are to serve only those who, like He himself, hated

¹ John 13:1; Philippians 2:5-9

² Acts 3:13-15

³ Romans 6:3-11

⁴ Galatians 2:19-20

⁵ John 7:19

⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:15-17

⁷ Mark 3:28-29; Matthew 12:30-32

in this world (not *disposed of*) everything that was their unchallenged property.

Jesus, therefore, can and wants to become the Teacher and Guide only to those who are perfectly aware of their hatred and aren't ashamed of it, for they rightly sense that their regret, bitterness and anger have their deep grounds. The Holy Spirit was promised exactly to those who are perfectly aware of the fact that they are evil¹; they just aren't as shameless as to hide it from God², even if they rightly don't flaunt it among their neighbors – all the more if they have really believed that his justice is much better than their justice that they would like to enforce on those who trespass against them. The words of the Master of Nazareth are only to serve the substantial correction of their own desires, expectations and hopes, and not their total denial, which is the devious intention of the murderer of faith.

In order to start the repair, one has to have something that needs repairing, but it is difficult to support in that effort anyone who claims that *it isn't him who's thinking, feeling and desiring, for it is Christ who is doing these things for him, and he is only his sacrosanct tool or vessel*. If someone is afraid of and casts away from him his own thoughts, feelings, outbursts of will, denying them, he will soon after become a hypocrite – washed at his own request by Satan from feelings, a thoughtless and passive creature – for he took the devil's purpose for God's, bearing by that a false testimony of the goodness and mercy of the Righteous One. It is a fanciful act of self-destruction, the result of which isn't the renewal, but depletion of the mind of all the marks of humanity, which are, by the power of God's law, subject to the need of purification and sanctification in faith.

To this day, bearing a cross is something very unpopular, because it belies all calculation, the goal of which is usually determining *whether it's worthwhile to us*, whereas the question of faith should inquire if it is pleasing to Him. The immediate goal of Christ's will isn't, therefore, the *exchange* of human thoughts into God's, but the arrangement of the human mind, its purification and renewal, so that it is able to consciously serve God's law, experiencing in the Spirit the peace and joy

¹ Luke 11:13

² 2 Corinthians 4:2

arising from the very partaking in its fullness. It is the only permissible sense of the famed *mortification of the flesh* (i.e., its sinful nature) by God's Spirit¹, which is being realized according to the colloquial rule *the eye of the master makes the horse fat* (not that *the horse is getting fat by looking at the master*, but *the master takes care of a horse that isn't too restive*).

That which is greater, fuller, loftier, nobler, draws and engulfs that which is small, deficient, mean and plain, not rejecting anything from that which comes to it. Otherwise God would contradict himself, for He ruled that the creation was very good. It just broke down, became lopsided and stale, and doesn't serve the glory of the Creator anymore. Hence Jesus' comparison of the unfaithful to stale salt, which is good so far as it gives taste to dishes and fertilizes the soil².

Christians might not like this blunt allusion to the fate of useless manure – it is their right and they are reluctant to renounce it. Nevertheless, the faithful could benefit from this warning, repeated on various occasions, against excessive trust in their own reserves and not-necessarily salutary potentials of mercy, the quality of which is tested in tribulation and persecution for the word of the gospel. For everyone will be salted with fire³.

To those who won't be too surprised by the experience of hatred towards brothers, sisters, parents, children and one's own self burning from within (in other words – who won't be offended by their own eye, leg or arm) and who will persevere under trial, awaiting purification and deliverance by the just and merciful judgment – to them it will also be easier to believe that around Caesarea Philippi Jesus knew what He was saying, when, above the heads of the crowds, He assured that *"there were those among them that wouldn't taste death until they saw the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom,"* taking in all who are thirsty for righteousness and consider themselves nothing, people of great faith and simplicity.

In our times a sense of guilt and shame is hard to come by, because the lure of the media, available without prescription, provides efficient protection from it. At the same time it convinces us, and that for big money, that *everything is possible, and even desired, and it's a sin to*

¹ Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:16-18;
Colossians 3:5-6

² Luke 14:33-35

³ Mark 9:49-50; 1 Peter 4:12-16

want and not be able to. It is only easy to embarrass people even with a wary supposition that Jesus Christ, thank God, wasn't his own master and listened to the voices coming to Him both from heaven and the earth much more attentively than the *mechanizators of the agriculture of grace* of today can afford. For they don't know which way the wind blows nor in which church the bell of terror tolls.

One only has to seriously take into account the fact that embarrassing scoffers can be quite costly and it is well when the right person is paying for it. Christians are ashamed only of Christ, because the greatness of his mercy and the power of his thought doesn't entirely suit them, and besides, there are few who fancy *wishing the ground to swallow them up*¹ out of shame for their own destitution and the destitution of those they love, as if all (!) that the earth was missing was faith in the power of God who pulls the elect out of the depths of hell.

¹ 2 Corinthians 12:9-11; 12:19-21

*He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come,
but woe to him through whom they come!
It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck
and he were thrown into the sea,
than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.
Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him;
and if he repents, forgive him.
And if he sins against you seven times a day,
and returns to you seven times, saying, «I repent,» forgive him."
The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"
And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed,
you would say to this mulberry tree,
«Be uprooted and be planted in the sea»; and it would obey you.
Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep,
will say to him when he has come in from the field,
«Come immediately and sit down to eat?»
But will he not say to him, «Prepare something for me to eat,
and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink;
and afterward you may eat and drink»?
He does not thank the slave because he did the things
which were commanded, does he?
So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say,
«We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.»"*

Luke 17:1-10

FAITH AND OBSTACLES

Support is health. If somebody wanted to prove that idleness and lack of activity prolong the life in this vale, he would rightly face mockery and ridicule. It would, however, be difficult to contradict him if he claimed that sweating buckets, blinkered eyes and a rider whipping the faint chariot don't make the heart of the heavenly Father glad.

For nothing destroys the tissue of Christ's body, so delicate and fragile on this earth, as much as racing against time – as much as the shouts of the *camel drivers*, pointing at mirages, who don't stop with the weary animals and people at the watering-place. Nothing diminishes hope like seeing unfruitful trees and mountains towering in front of the eyes of those who had already forgotten how the bed of a rapid stream looks like¹.

Jesus had no doubts that the way of the truth would be dishonored by treacherous obstacles which would be placed in it by people seeking their own glory. That's why He warned his elect against the Pharisaic leaven of hypocrisy, which also today turns his grateful flocks into processions of flagellants bound by an alien yoke.

He also assured them that a little bit of faith is enough in order to root out the plant not planted by the Father, and throw the mountain of requirements imposed on the little ones into the sea. Because the way to heaven is devoid of hills and pits not because people deserved comforts, but because they didn't deserve pity and were defended by the gracious provision of the Lord of Hosts.

Nowadays, Christians insist that they have earned grace – that it is simply due because they believe. Even if they claim otherwise – that they are unworthy of it – they prefer to think that it's the time of grace that is over, than that it's their faith that lacks anything. They give ear to the devilry which perversely demonstrates that the Father in heaven is a miser if there ever was one, and which delights the souls that are sick and drunk with God's wrath with the image of thorns piercing the flesh, for they are

¹ Proverbs 18:4

flattered by the thought that they didn't end up among the executioners of the Savior¹.

Each of the maledictions against the Son will be forgiven by the Father to those who know not what they do. But the opposition to God's Spirit will be felt by everyone the hard way, as a great burden hung around their neck and the depths flooding their mouth and eyes² that forgot how the Faithful and True looks like and how He speaks. It will be better for everyone to experience the royal law than if they were to see the gates of hell, where they would be directed by a sentence on the defectors from the throne of grace³.

*"It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come,
but woe to him through whom they come!"*

They will thank God for the millstone and the rope pulling them to the bottom when they notice the stumbling blocks placed in the way of the little ones. When they see how they taught children to help adults, instead of trusting them; when they remember how busily they collected the tags with the prices of their own renunciations, so that their graves would be plastered with them; how they showed their spiritual muscles to those who barely dragged themselves to the well; how they chucked with disbelief and envy over the jewels of faith; how ravenously and bitingly they declared the guilt of others, not wanting to know their Judge.

The Lord will stuff down their throats the mocking judgments upon the disabled and weak, who don't do what they are doing because they are sober and wiser, and not more slothful, conceited and ungrateful. And when they recognize that they estimated the Righteous One at less than thirty pieces of silver, then it will turn out who they are: whether they keep the words of truth or hate it more than the fire of hell, which fuels this hatred, consuming itself.

Nowadays, the church resembles a presumptuous do-it-herselfer: she saves by herself, purifies, justifies and cures by herself, judges by herself and worships by herself, for her pride is offended by the Father's mercy, which wants to cover her nakedness so that she wouldn't be a stumbling block to others. The servants are like the foxes that the judge Samson

¹ Matthew 23:29-39

² Luke 17:1-2; Mark 9:43-49;

² Peter 2:21-22

³ Luke 12:45-46; Jeremiah 34:17-20

released in revenge on the Philistines' fields and vineyards, tying to each pair's tails a burning torch¹.

Instead of plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, tending vineyards and olive groves, they're burning everything they touch, for they run from fire instead of submitting to it – because they can't tell the flame of a candle from the blaze of the fire that is consuming them. They meddle with other peoples' business, and when they receive a fitting reprimand for that, they call it *persecution*. They snort and laugh at human poverty and call their dalliance and callous judgments a *mission to the poor*.

And it's only these *poor* that aren't to be found – there is no trace of these new and beautiful people, called together by the Word, who once asked their Master to increase their faith, because forgiving the neighbor seven times a day was more than they could bear².

But the Lord told them that faith isn't *big and soft*, but small and hard like a mustard seed³ – almost invisible, so ridiculously small that it is ready to pray to be rejected so that others would be able to pass through the narrow gate⁴.

The Lord told them not to strive for much, but only for that without which they wouldn't survive until his return. He told them not to require miracles of themselves, because someone else is dealing with that – someone who would prefer for them to consider themselves at the end of each day as unworthy servants⁵, as garbage that nobody needs, because that which is valuable in their eyes isn't valuable in the eyes of the Righteous One, to whom heeding the Lord is better than the fat of rams⁶.

"For what do the children care how much you plowed and how long you pastured, wanting to give them a slice of bread and some milk, so that they would never forget, when they grow up, this simple truth that where the Spirit of the Father's promise is, true food and drink can also be found, and hope for survival when the house is grasped by a hard frost⁷? The ministry of mercy deprives these puppies of their small dignity and small reason

¹ Judges 15:3-8

² Luke 17:4-5; John 1:45-46

³ Matthew 13:31-32

⁴ Romans 9:1-5

⁵ Luke 17:10

⁶ 1 Samuel 15:18-24

⁷ Matthew 24:20-25

because of their entanglement in falsehood. Whose costs and renunciations are they to have before their eyes? Is it the costs of the father who once gave them a thrashing on bare buttocks, even though he knew well that they wouldn't ever thank him for that?"

The devil doesn't thank nor applaud the judges of God's righteousness who scold the children of the living God that are blind to their own destitution. He's always saying:

*"Prepare something for me to eat,
and properly clothe yourself
and serve me while I eat and drink;
and afterward you may eat and drink."*¹

And the faithful servant says in his spirit:

"All right, I will give you the very best of what I have, all the tasty bites and drinks. I will give you on a platter the lust of this sister who is stupefied with fear, teaching propriety at the table of debauchery, not wanting to know her Lord. I will serve you a fricassee made of mendacious sauceboxes who look back while plowing, hoping that someone will notice their toil and anguish. I will douse it with delicious bechamel sauce for you, at the sight of which people of twisted minds lick their lips, forgetting that the word of the Lord is like fuller's soap and like a hammer which shatters a rock.

I will judge the one who considers his stick an oracle and steals glory from God, instead of giving it to Him. Eat him, for what does the Lord care for the dogs fattened on every offal, whose bickering is heard when their Master comes, and never at the sight of a murderer with a sausage in his hand. I will look into the hearts of all those who tremble greedily before the thought that somebody will come and judge with righteousness the little ones committed to their care – as if all judgment and power was given by the Father to the mean and fainthearted wrigglers, and not to his beloved Son.

¹ Luke 17:7-8

I will make it so that you smell the aroma of raging sea billows that is so pleasing to you, and fleecy clouds without rain, driven by the east wind, will be wafting from the saucepan. You will see wandering stars, crumbs of stardust that glitter for a moment to fall into the deepest dark.

I will satisfy you with the sight of uprooted trees and mountains thrown into the sea. You will hear the whimpering of the idolaters and the wailing of the Roman patrons of the domestic flame, who had men that were used to satisfying their most secret desires.

I will give you all you like, until you are satiated, until you say:

«Yes, I satiated my belly with the disgrace of these contemptible bastards, these children born out of wedlock. They will surely be converted to me now, come to me in sackcloth, they will tear their garments and lament the misery of these atrocious sinners, whom my Enemy hasn't yet infected with faith in some . . . Son.

Oh, how I adore this, when the faithful servants pay a tithe to the Lord and the rest to me – when faith stinks to them, and blasphemy smells nice. When they consider the words «it seems to me» a token of humility, and when somebody says that «he is sure», they see in him a self-appointed coxcomb. It's pure bliss when they become indifferent to truth and falsehood, adulating my liars of merit and despising the orders of God's angels.»

Yes, you will get all this, served on royal tableware, at once, as soon as your servant returns from the field. And the relish of the supper will be his abasement, for he won't arouse pity in any of the stony hearts. But you won't see one thing, for I will hide from you this view that I desire with my own body. You won't see how the unearthly brilliance of the pure Spirit steals into the human soul, how it animates and strengthens the body, faint from accusations, which worships the Uncreated One, because it knows that the One who scans the secrets of human hearts doesn't knock down, but lifts up. And then, when my lamp goes out – you speak rightly – I too will eat and drink, but not with you, you beast.

For I didn't deserve this meal with daily labor and anguish – no human being ever deserved it. I didn't satiate my soul with any of the inexorable judgments on my neighbors, because they hit me

first and I understood that they are exceedingly gracious. I didn't add vinegar to their wine nor leaven to their bread, so that also their judgments and life might take on the power that I took and will take from You, Jesus.

And when I was reaching for crumbs from lordly tables and thanking God that I wasn't spat upon¹, I was thinking only about when You would come and try me in my stifling poverty, when You would cut the bonds of conscience that command to bear with the recreants who worship silver and gold idols². And all that in order to be able to sit with You at the free supper that You promised to your elect – those who lived and loved on this earth the way You did – to death, and washed their robes not in detergent with bleach, but in the blood of the Lamb³.”

Today, Christians wash their garments in their own blood, outrun each other in saviorly ideas, so that nobody overtakes them in their race to the feast with Lucifer himself. Nothing entices the depraved lackeys as much as the satanic mill that grinds people instead of grain. And it spits out, like a production line, moral dwarfs, machines incapable of pity, that idolize the factory of dreams, whose last thought is the thought of a certain wise man from Nazareth to submit to the laws of this world, but not for anything to its lustfulness⁴.

People need to be reminded of the law, because when prophetic admonitions grow silent, the faith in forgiveness of sins dies, and along with it the voice of the greatest power in heaven and on earth, able to raise the dead. It is replaced by *spiritual musclemen, stuntmen, wizards, used car whizzes* and other *mechanizators of agriculture* who take the flock for cannon fodder or the subject of private transactions and lightly send it across the sea or straight into the troops of the enemy, who always says: *“The more, higher, louder, smoother, prettier and cheaper, the better.”*

But the faithful know that the court of the King of kings consists of lepers, cripples, blind men, louts and the mute ones⁵, to whom the way to heaven is sometimes shorter than to the store, and other games and fairs of human vanity, even those on the television, are entirely out of their

¹ Galatians 4:14

² Revelation 2:2

³ Revelation 7:13-17

⁴ Romans 12:1-2

⁵ 1 Samuel 22:1-2; Proverbs 31:3-9

way. Therefore, they will be more eager to heed the Lord's commands than they will let anyone talk them into seeing a soap opera or buying tickets to the circus, too expensive to the soul. They will only be doing what they were told, and won't be enticed by the reward for *iniquitous deeds* – for the sober judgment over the life that was entrusted to their care.

For they know well that they no longer live¹ – someone Else lives in them – that God's judgment reached their bowels and found nothing worth keeping there, apart from a longing, animated by a shameless and foolish hope, for the Righteous and Merciful One. It is them who will find employment with the Lord of the harvest, even if with the threshing, where every wise child will quickly learn to distinguish grain from chaff, life from death, and the laughter that defaces the body and saddens the Head from benevolent angelic glances, the glow of which strengthens, purifies and cements the Bride owing to God the spirit of life.

When the disciples of the Master of Nazareth stand over the stray flock, they have in front of their eyes a lifelike picture of the last ministry of their Lord. And they never forget that it isn't their greatness that draws the little ones in and saves them from perdition, but the greatness of the King who took off his own robes before He washed the feet of the stinkpots² and left the exaltation to the One greater than himself. For only this one Man on earth, who didn't sail under false colors, but renounced what He had, knowing that the Fatherly cloak doesn't adorn anyone, but covers the nakedness of everyone who doesn't greedily insist to hear – like Him – from haughty lips: "*Behold, the Man!*"³

This robe warms everyone whom it doesn't prejudice in the least when they're pointed at as a shrewd serpent⁴, and not a dove. For even the basest of animals is worthy of its name if it seeks water and food for its offspring. And the unworthy servant from Jesus' parable belongs to such. He knows well that if he doesn't hand out the sinner on a plate, satanic pride will completely ruin the saintly community that satiates its vanity with the sight of scabby sheep⁵, instead of strengthening the heart with

¹ Galatians 2:17-21

² John 13:4-5

³ John 19:4-22

⁴ Matthew 10:16

⁵ 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

grace, and indulges in the poisoned fare of blasphemies against the Son who came to wipe out sins, and not to conceal them.

The Lord Christ spoke to the apostles who were wondering how one could be as impudent as to oppose seven times a day the ones who *bet on the Messiah* – and, besides, have every right to it until the time when the Spirit of the Father's promise steps out of the way¹. They stopped wondering about that when this same Spirit reminded them how many times the Lord's patience covered their shamelessness, tirelessly convincing them that it isn't their *choice* that counts, but their faithfulness. Then, heavenly forbearance overpowered these *yappy greyhounds*, which from that moment on knew the scent of their Master's enemy and his treacherous, delicious baits.

They were able to tell a robber from his victim, so the disciples and their faithful imitators evaded the severe insanity² that, in warped minds, makes of Jesus an *illegitimate babe of a woman of easy virtue* – too comely for the mother of the Redeemer and suspiciously virtuous, as if she was out of the reach of the *apostolic claws and fangs* tearing the veil off the beautiful corpse in order to wrest from her murderous embraces the children of the living God. Her ghastly brilliance will grow pale when the only angel before whom she trembles stands against her. He will know his Empowerer well when he pronounces his name: "*Light from Light, true God from true God.*" The fakes will be consumed by their own fire, and the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father³.

Only the least ones, however, have such nerve. They don't crowd to the great mountain of human merit, but throw it into the sea if it stands in their way. They don't rest in the shade of unfruitful trees, but curse them in the name of the Lord, for they remember that wanderers must be travelling, and not strolling back and forth. They must be eating, and not *smelling flowers and admiring the view of the bright future*. They won't compete with anyone nor measure other walkers' time, because their measure and strength won't be of use to the weary and thirsty. They will become, by the will of the Father, the footstool of the Righteous One, so that the blind would be able to see and notice at least the mighty

¹ 2 Thessalonians 2:6-8

² 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12

³ Matthew 13:37-43

for review in Publishers Weekly only

Overturning mountains and other minor duties of saints

footprints on the faithful and vast wastelands of the Lord of heaven and earth.

May 25th, 1999

When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene,
coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus.
And following Him was a large crowd of the people,
and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him.
But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem,
stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.
For behold, the days are coming when they will say, «Blessed are the barren,
and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.»
Then they will begin to say to the mountains, «Fall on us,» and to the hills, «Cover us.»
For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"
Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away
to be put to death with Him. When they came to the place called The Skull,
there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.
But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."
And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.
And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him,
saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself
if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." The soldiers also mocked Him,
coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, and saying,
"If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!"
Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS."
One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him,
saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" But the other answered,
and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God,
since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?
And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving
what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."
And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"
And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

THE HANGMAN'S PERSPECTIVE

When one wants to kill someone in the majesty of the law, it is well to have connections at the judge's. When one wants to kill the judge, it is well to personally know his principal. All the worse for the whim when the judge is as pure as the driven snow in the eyes of the one who appointed him; what is left then is to facilitate the escape of a convict from a maximum security prison and briefly make him and offer he can't refuse.

When, however, someone aims a blow at the Judge of the living and the dead, and He tells him: *"Watch out, boy!"*, it is better to apologize to Him and see the Light than to hang oneself. It wasn't only the Jews who happened to have such a whim, but it was them who killed the Originator of life and its Redeemer in their murderous infatuation.

The voices of wonder and admiration for the tortured wise man, miracle-worker and healer, who was heading for the place of execution with a helper carrying his cross¹, already hushed. It didn't occur anymore to any of the women to bless the mother of the Messiah², for none of them would want to experience her son's death.

But if there wasn't anything more terrifying on earth than death from the hands of merciless executioners, this exhausted prisoner wouldn't be willing to admonish the divided and imprisoned souls which He came to save, nor to speak to the bodies which He was to redeem with his own.

*"Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me,
but weep for yourselves and for your children.
For behold, the days are coming when they will say,
«Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore,
and the breasts that never nursed.»
Then they will begin to say to the mountains,
«Fall on us», and to the hills, «Cover us.»³*

¹ Luke 23:26

² Luke 11:24-32

³ Hosea 10:1-8

*For if they do these things when the tree is green,
what will happen when it is dry?"¹*

Jesus knew that the trial and the unlawful judgment that He was subjected to would, by the will of the Father, tighten like a treacherous noose on the necks of all those who would hold their own measure against it. For the pits of hell remain open not only before murderers, but also before those who, in the name of human rights, intercede for the ones oppressed and persecuted by human authority, and express their sympathies and condolences on glossy paper through deputies wearing ties.

The Master understood very well that lamenting his fate² was something deeply inappropriate in the eyes of his Father who knows best that mankind eagerly deplores and rails over the ones dishonored by strangers, but rarely listens to the dishonored and abased, and very rarely follows into their footsteps.

If He hadn't, like the apocalyptic eagle flying in midheaven³, foretold three times what would happen with the Son of Man, the tears of the women accompanying Him could have testified of the same thing as the sobs of the Ephesians saying goodbye to apostle Paul when he had unexpectedly grieved them with the news that they wouldn't see him again⁴.

But the women by the way of the cross couldn't feel this pure pain with which people of faith say goodbye to the ones who are most dear to them on earth. Jesus wasn't the way, truth and life to them – He wasn't the Commander and Savior – He was another victim of human wickedness which they sometimes witnessed from afar. He was a victim that didn't teach them to love their husbands and care for themselves and

¹ Luke 23:28-31

The last phrase should sound like this: "For if such things happen when the tree is green, what will happen when it dries up?"

The Righteous one couldn't have had anything else in mind than the fact that the crime intended and perpetrated on Him constitutes the most blatant evidence of the fierce opposition of the inhabitants of Earth towards his Empowerer's decisions and decrees, previously shown by Him in a parable. With his admonition to the *daughters of Jerusalem*, Jesus demonstrates the reality of

the ominously-sounding prophecy of Hosea (being fulfilled in front of their very eyes) in the times when the fundament of faith was the hope for justification before God based on the works of God's law, manifestly rejected by the executioners of the Son of Man. Lawlessness was to intensify this blasphemous madness to which the Almighty left everyone except the believers in the Father's warranty of the promise given to Israel (author's note).

² Luke 23:27; Revelation 1:7

³ Revelation 8:13

⁴ Acts 20:24-38

their children more reasonably. Only that now, along with the departing Messiah, they were also bewailing the idolatrous vision of messianic greatness that was fleeing from their sight – greatness in which there is space for glory for the Almighty only as long as He himself doesn't demand anything.

Jesus couldn't lift up the spirit of those who hadn't yet possessed the Spirit of faith and, like his disciples, were worrying that *they couldn't do anything good for Him*. He could only fulfill his task like a captured soldier, whose alert mind keeps the secrets that were entrusted to Him from the enemy – and does it much better than those whose presence on earth isn't such a great puzzle to anyone as the presence of the Uncreated One in a created body.

God the Father hid in the chosen Son – and only in Him – the treasures of knowledge and spiritual wisdom, so that no hands and eyes unauthorized by Him would prematurely snatch the freedom promised to his children. And so that the freedom promised by the unauthorized ones¹ would become a heavy yoke to themselves – a yoke that only He can remove, because only He himself has one day removed the sins of the whole earth; so everyone in whose sight this very Savior doesn't fit to the gospel is laying traps for his own feet.

In the face of all the principalities of this earth, Jesus became a victim – but He wasn't one. He was and remained the Lord of these principalities, to which He submitted, by the Father's will, like a seasoned chess player, who, giving the greedy opponent the most powerful chess piece, checkmates him in the next move – only that the stake was our life, and the chess piece wasn't made of wood either.

The Father could easily have given the Son twelve legions of angels if He himself had asked for that², but then nobody would need convincing anymore; no faith would be expected from anyone – the one and only thing for which the Father of Mercy is searching with His lamp on this earth.

Neither a small nor a great criminal would even manage to utter a groan and shelter himself from the light which will one day reach all the petty, twisted designs of people hiding from fear of the terror of the message.

¹ 2 Peter 2:18-22

² Matthew 26:49-56

Then it wouldn't occur to anyone to become weak in order to win the weak¹, nor to become despised by those who don't despise only the bribes of the authorities in the heavenly places².

Nobody would see the morning star reflecting a patch of the rising sun, because there wouldn't be anyone to wait and long for it. This is exactly – and only – why Christ the Lord became lower than the petty and perverse lusts of the principalities of the chosen nation expected, and along with them the lusts of all those who are *creating grace* instead of reliably testifying to it.

When on a winter's day an adult gets hit in the back by a snowball, he can be almost certain that it is one of the shouting bunch of rascals who couldn't resist and aimed a blow at a passer-by who was bigger than himself, for a great crime is in the eyes of a child a much greater delight. When the passer-by turns around, he will sometimes see shy and embarrassed eyes of the culprit peeking from behind a tree, catching with relief the kindly smile, softening the frown of the *sufferer*, because they know well that a snowball in the hand of an adult isn't the same as one in the hand of an adolescent.

It even happens sometimes that on the next day the same child, instead of throwing his *deadly missile* again, says "*Good morning*" to the gracious stranger and, rejoicing in the answer, regains its charm and dignity of little faith, which doesn't yet think of the end of its journey, because it doesn't know it, although it knows that it doesn't live by its own politeness nor because it displays impeccable behavior at school.

Children irretrievably lose their little charm trying to imitate adults too faithfully, because the eyes of the latter usually lack this deep, convincing fervor with which the Spirit of the Lord serves sinners. And only He himself has this power that turns from madness the people who set a table for capricious Fortune³ and make pacts with the realm of the dead⁴.

But only a few will listen to his voice, patient as a gust of wind. And when lawlessness is increased, love will grow cold – even the love of those who took Him at his word. They will praise and worship the Father's majesty, knowing nothing about the abasement of his angels. They will stare imploringly at mountain-tops while trampling and rootling

¹ 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

² Luke 16:13-15

³ Isaiah 65:1-12

⁴ Isaiah 28:14-22

about God's crops. They will chase the wind on seas and rivers, only so that it would blow into their limp sails in order that they would be able to sail where they want.

The thought of an empty room will scare them, so they will look for company and buy it for the *enhanced gospel*, which will exchange the one law of spiritual life and growth for four, which will ruin it¹. They will be admiring the views and the beauty of created nature and insincerely do penance in front of idols made in the likeness of that which perishes. They will forget that pilgrims on a mountain path don't stop when they want to, but only when they have to take a breath, because they are to make it before dusk and not lose their way.

There will be only one thing that will remain to the lust revolting against God's decrees, which they didn't manage to cover with the blanket of the old covenant that is too short for anyone. The fire of God's anger will burn them. Because if the former ones had thought that mountains and hills surrounding Jerusalem would cover the blood of the Innocent One with which they charged themselves and their children in the times when works righteousness still inspired respect and admiration, and even though fruitless and not giving anyone hope, it still cast a blissful shade with its thick foliage on the surely solid efforts of the priests of the old order – where, if not under the mountains of the whole earth, will the people seeking their own glory look for the desired shade when this tree will wither, cursed by the Lord of heaven and earth?²

Where will they run from the gospel – all those to whom God the Father was *too foolish*, renouncing his glory on behalf of those who can't and don't want to live without the hope of seeing the Son returning in glory – they can't and don't want to forget this invisible power of the Father that took them out, in the blink of an eye, of the mire in which they had been stuck, and set them on a rock?

Where will these glassy, dead and cold eyes looking for a dark corner turn, if not to the caverns of the rocks and depths of the sea, where the darkness and the cold will touch their bodies burning with a blasphemous fever, but won't extinguish this inhuman lustfulness which devours itself like a heap of chaff with a spark thrown at it?

¹ Matthew 24:7-13

² Luke 3:9; 13:6-9; Mark 11:12-14

What could ignite this bloody, seemingly innocent, and even noble rebellion against the parent's will, if not sparks – if not the instance when the son went to a dark room as a punishment, and heard from behind its door the father's hushed laughter, or when the adolescent daughter didn't get the flowers and expensive gifts intended for the mother?

What could estrange brothers if not such a trifle as the fact that their mother didn't lavish her caress equally, and the father treated one of them like a victim of fate? Will the wife be justified by a burning spark of jealousy when she sees excessive fatherly familiarity bestowed on her daughter? Should the husband lose his mind when his better half opens her mouth to everyone and he is the only one whom she begrudges her confessions and attention?

Will these trifles justify in the holy eyes all those who became more honest, cunning, wise, improved their looks, makeup, wrapped themselves up in guidebooks, television crap and pages torn out of the Bible only so that some conniving suck-up would shake their hand and that some smart boss would smile at them with the discounted *smile number* 5? Would we place these slight, festering faults of our neighbors where ours had already been weighed?

There will be many whose ear won't open to the imploring sigh of God's Spirit, and whose eye won't open to the sight of bloody sweat of a Jew from Nazareth praying in the garden of Gethsemane. For his snow-white robe scares the ghouls who bind people, but doesn't scare them away from those who – upon the request of the hobgoblins – will do anything not to trust Jesus, who is Lord, and not to finish the race as a flame of a candle waiting peacefully for its time engulfed from the front and back by a powerful hand.

At the Place of the Skull, only one man had no doubts that the heavenly Father could have something to say there, even in his case. He was hanged next to the Righteous One and this man managed to notice that the difference between him and the Messiah wasn't ominous, but saving. For even if he himself rose against his own father or didn't want to, or couldn't, know him, the Father of this Son, whose countenance wasn't deformed by any grimace of hatred or groan of complaint against his executioners, made him think.

He was amazed and surprised at this lively and awe-inspiring image of obedience to the invisible and intangible will of someone whom this Righteous One trusted, bearing in silence the mockery and ridicule of the soldiers whom he would gladly spit in the face – and if he could, he would personally muzzle the yapping companion of his earthly anguish.

He was the first reliable witness and participant of the Lord's passion, because he didn't have anything more to lose than the life awakened like hope in a boy at the word from his elder brother – from the *real man*, at whom he threw a snowball.

Jesus had to let down the women weeping over Him and disappear from the eyes of all those who saw in Him a god of fertility and abundance, and today see a god of success. All the heralds of truly good news out of this world were also to disappear – and will disappear – from this earth to follow Him. But the hope given to the faithful guardians of God's order by the one and only Spirit who gathers what is scattered, feeds what is hungry and gives drink to what is thirsty, wasn't to disappear or fail.

And this food and drink are the judgments of the Lord's mercy over the stray flock, and not a teary, delusive and capricious tenderness of artsy dreamers gazing into the mirror, who think only about how not to lose face before the great and unfeeling Examiner who has no face but has many ideas for a better tomorrow.

This food is the sinful body, purified by the word of truth, of servants and handmaidens of Christ who, with every day and hour, grow into the likeness of their Master. Like a root drawing water from the earth, the lowest shoots pump the water of salvation into the faint branches unable to bear the gifts and fruit of the Spirit.

For the latter aren't similar to the brittle and flaccid decorations of a Christmas tree nor to breakable Easter eggs, and God's gifts aren't *presents for good children* – they can be lifted, kept and given out only by faith in the Son of God, and not by faith in faith, which buries its head in the sand at the sound of the trumpet and the sight of a shining sword.

God isn't an executioner, but a Guide – in a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day – a Guide who sometimes bars and blocks the way of rioters with the body of his faithful, but guides only those who are far from the lament of the daughters of Jerusalem, warned by one of the last

of the great prophecies of the Messiah to spare themselves at least this one sorrow.

For womanly throes won't worthily adorn the most holy tabernacle, which the High Priest of the new order entered only with his own blood – the tabernacle where what is worshiped and loved is the will of the Originator of life which has been revealed to the faithful, and not the twisted designs of the enemy of truth and murderer of human beings, who sleeps soundly as long as his prisoners listen to the will of the haughty *mother* looking down on the lion cubs running around and their sweet – so far – frolics.

Probably for the last time in their lives, the women at Jesus' grave were preparing for the Old Testament ministry of anointing the body. Some more time elapsed until they fully understood that the spices and the anointing would be of use to themselves rather than their killed Lord. But even then the perfumes and ointments that they brought with them, forgetting about the advice of the king's eunuch for Esther¹, proved useless. And angels admonished the first witnesses of the resurrection one more time, so that the next ones wouldn't look for the Lord in places that bear even a slight resemblance to a tomb².

For his people prefer inns³ and overthrow mountains on the way to them⁴. They don't creep under the hills to craftily prove on their last legs to the little ones the unfairness of the Father, who, according to the delusive wrigglers, is *too violent* for their peaceful vision of the salvation of humanity, and the behavior of his Son borders in their eyes on robbery in broad daylight.

And rightly so, because the *thieves of grace* stop at nothing, similarly to the murderers of the authorities in the heavenly places who are well paid by the Father – not because they are insensitive, but because they are too sensitive to the fumes of sulfur from the pits of hell and they aren't obliged to ask people for permission for a rescue operation.

Because they are equipped with reason, while doing it they make use of the strange and very undemocratic privilege of faith. They tread on vipers and scorpions, all the while extending their hand and speaking to the Bride, who easily forgets that only the Great Serpent has the tender,

¹ Esther 2:12-15

² Luke 24:1-8

³ Luke 10:34-35

⁴ Mark 11:20-26

dove-like heart of the balky Jonah, who let himself be thrown overboard¹ and, in an unusual manner, found himself on the way to the great city² that believed even the not-so-good news³.

And back then the herald wasn't accompanied by women, whom the Master's disciples didn't believe that the God who really had died really lives and didn't change his mind concerning that promise at all⁴.

June 21st, 1999



Exposition

The understanding of the essence and meaning of Christ's blessing undergoes perpetual erosion, and the buildings that are not strengthened in truth are sapped in a flash by a storm wave of lies about the Savior of the world. The progressive ruin of spiritual life is remarkably promoted by thoughtless pressing of ideals, markers of conduct, formulated into apostolic and prophetic commandments and directions, into frameworks of complex, but dry doctrinal skeletons of the confession of Christian faith, the sense and destiny of which isn't an existence for itself. For faith is formed and strengthened only by a living and mysterious bond with the Resurrected One, who protects it by his Spirit and gives the faithful exactly what they need.

The apostles themselves wouldn't be delighted to see the veneration surrounding their modest persons, accompanied by a lack of obsequiousness towards the truths to the teaching of which they devoted their grace-spared lives. Nevertheless, the one blessed in their sight was only he who acted and spoke as they did. Thus, for example, the Spirit of truth was to rest upon those who were reviled, despised and ridiculed for the faithfulness to the word of the gospel that was entrusted to them⁵.

Nowadays, Paul would undoubtedly be refused the *status of the blessed* by many – for instance when he met with mockery and rejection by the

¹ Jonah 1:10-16

² Jonah 2:1-10

³ Jonah 3:3-10

⁴ Luke 24:9-12

⁵ 1 Peter 4:14

Athenians¹, because when reading that passage they saw the image of someone very *ineffective*, inefficient, simply *someone who didn't make it*. A Christian, however, remains one (not only by name) not necessarily when his personal ratings are soaring, and even not necessarily when they're free-falling and nothing adds up. He remains one only when he *abides in the Word* (i.e. keeps it by obeying its commandments) and is inhabited not by *some spirit*, but this Spirit.

Nowadays, even deep believers succumb to the frantic manias of pragmatic and egalitarian ideas, and in fact just to the rapid whirls of their murky washings which have lost their idolatrous greatness in the clamor of the historic machinery shredding human experiences. It is manifested by the fact that they try, by hook or by crook, using all sorts of deodorants, tricks and attire to prove to others that *they love and achieve admirable success in that love* – they are reasonable, educated, obedient, lenient, restrained, patient and zealous at once, and they do it the more insistently and more frantically, the more the facts available to eyes and ears testify against them.

In other words, the Church has become sort of extrasensory and phantasmagoric in its obstinacy to prove to the world that it exists and abides despite, and even in defiance of the rottenness at which it is eagerly pointing. Unfortunately, it proves only the unbelief of the confessors of the one and only God in the current and real power and supernatural efficiency of the most serious act of the incarnation of the Son of God.

This industrial-scale passion of the *grace syndicates* doesn't result from the irreverence for social verdicts – for in fact, it is the Church that is socialized – but from the irreverence for the words of Jesus, which are to remind, explain and make people aware of the peril of their own position and the gravity and importance of the redeeming ministry of the Almighty Father's emissary.

A Christian can and should be changing, but he mustn't, under any circumstances, do it at his own expense. For his own nature, its *ingenuity* and *pugnacity*, will after all trump God's, and he might lack nothing, but in the face of tribulations and persecutions he will lack the fruit

¹ Acts 17:32

of the Spirit, drawing their reliable and recognizable attractiveness only from the root of faith.

No matter what it is that God has graciously equipped him with, in himself he will remain an inwardly dead stump, a moral dwarf feigning customary godliness and using for his own aims every power that someone incautiously gives him. His goals will be conservative and deadly to any plant sprouting from grace which follows the light by itself if it isn't obstructed from it.

Jesus sensed this danger very distinctly. An obvious sign of it in Jerusalem was to Him the blending of the earthly and heavenly idea of salvation, embodied in Him, which was soon consciously called redemption. Since their expulsion from Eden, people were to experience first-hand various obstacles and hindrances in the ways to their own goals. But eternal life never was to be divided by some racetrack with too high hurdles, a need for peculiar and fanciful courtesy towards the Holy One or other requirements of any carnal proficiency.

The Son himself, and only He, was to become the *license from the Mayor*, for the Father expected intercession for us on *blank paper* with his own stamp, so that nobody on earth could have even a shadow of a doubt that they won't save themselves, and also so that they could sober up after the inebriation that wasn't very delightful to them after all, and allow for themselves to be convinced that they need salvation very much.

Christians have had a massive *hangover* for a long time now, because they treat it with *bartenders* who reach for a *hair of the dog* from the hands of obliging heathen benefactors flooding the media market with a deep and desired nostalgia after the *myth of eternal return*, which supposedly – as the advertising slogans have it – restores people to their own neighbor-trampled dignity.

How highly incredible this dignity is can be testified by the usually very unanimous reaction of the listeners on hearing that God is after all alive, even though He died, and that what He expects from them isn't what they would expect of Him. It is more, because He convinces and persuades them to what they themselves wouldn't even feel like thinking about. The panic in their minds, however, proves exactly what their famed stranger foretold two thousand years ago in a parable.

Today, *wombs and breasts* are venerated and given a wide berth or are secretly craved for, denying by that their purpose consistent with the order of things. If not for the all-powerful body cult, demanding tributes and decorations for beauties *unblemished* by motherhood and martyrs' halos for mothers who had long forgotten the sound of the voice of their children's father, it would be easy to suspect the Master of a gross overkill in passing judgments about the thing that, in the eyes of the world, would soon be the sole worthy object of human blessings¹.

The edge of Jesus' thought, however, doesn't only point out the obvious. It also encompasses in one glance the whole worldly madness of beatification and canonization of all attributes of fertility, effectiveness and efficiency, no matter what cause they serve². Thence the contemporary production, the usefulness of which is measured by the number of sold items, thence godliness measured by number of confessors and the range of its influence, thence, finally, all the attractiveness estimated by the attention and applause of its admirers.

The sterilization of the *body of Christ* proceeds smoothly and the emancipated Church is bothered even by the very rare sight of men and women staring not where the impudent VIPs of salvation would like them to; men and women born and nourished far³ from their haughty eyes and condescending but empty gestures.

The elevated creation is silent, but God is speaking, showing his faithful poisoned springs and confluences of great rivers where the water isn't suitable for drinking, and the roots of the plants that weren't planted by Him, the crop of which satiates only vanity which is reluctant to open the pages of the Revelation. To it, arrogance is *courage*, lust and greed are *love*, servility is *service*, law is an *inconvenience*, what is commonplace passes for *holy*, unclean for *immaculate*, and food isn't to serve the body anymore, but the other way round.

When you ask an average Christian who his Lord is, even if he doesn't take offence at the question, he will barely manage to recite the doctrinal cheat sheet, thinking that it's time for an exam – a *test of his faith*. But it would be in vain to look for his gaze when he hears Job's news. His totally whitewashed conscience will tell him to suspect God of harm

¹ Luke 23:29

² Romans 1:18-25

³ Revelation 12:6-17

and unfairness, and his hypocrisy won't let him even admit that openly, ensuring his neighbors with the eloquence of afflicted blast that his *faith* submits to the *will of the Lord*. Sometimes the pagans are better and more honest, because they had no opportunity to deny the one whom they didn't know, and they don't have the nerve of the *converted ones* to secretly defend God from the judgment that they previously passed on Him¹.

Jesus' blunt expression concerning the essence of the twisting of God's design by satanic tricks is at the same time the most accurate articulation of contemporary matters from the view of the apocalyptic eagle, which has never had even one feather plucked from his powerful wings casting a shadow on the earth.

Jesus' merciless irony is also visible in the next passage, cited from the prophetic book². From his statement it clearly follows that the idolatrous cult of creation will reach such insane dimensions that, on hearing the news of God's judgment (and I doubt that Christians should avoid it), people will submit to the power of overprotective deities of nature. Its majesty, created by themselves, will seem to them a better guarantee than the words of the one awaited by the elect. They will by that very act pass upon themselves a judgment which will be revealed by the Righteous and only Judge of the living and the dead.

By the way, the absurdity of running from God's anger was distinctly pointed out by John the Baptist who saw the motives of those who thought that by fulfilling one more – additional and extracurricular – rule of the law, they would gain special prerogatives, making them first in the Kingdom of the Messiah. Thus his merciful, after all, question to the ones coming to be baptized:

"You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"³

"That's right – who? But for God, you wouldn't even think about the upcoming peril. And can the one who warns against his own anger mean harm? Certainly, but only in overweening stony hearts greedy for their own glory, which, on hearing of the saving judgment, don't lift up

¹ 2 Peter 2:17-22

² Luke 23:30; Hosea 10:8; Revelation 6:16

³ Matthew 3:7-9

their heads, but hide them, testifying by that of the fact that they didn't believe the Son, but idols arrayed according to their own wish on every hill and under every green tree."

The credibility of the messianic prophecy, uttered in God's Spirit by the Originator of life heading to his death, was confirmed by the fact, presented to the eyes of attentive witnesses, of an atrocity unprecedented in the history of the world. Its meaning was fully illumined by the Spirit of the Father's promise given to those who understood that God repaid them with bread for stone. The meaning and resonance of human passions, concentrated in one point of time and space on the only human on earth who had nothing on his conscience, was revealed to their eyes and ears.

They will also be the only ones able to admit that their Lord didn't waste his breath and didn't die in vain. For bowing down to creation has indeed all the more united the hypocrites and liars of our time, among whom only few remain who admire and respect at least plain human decency, let alone the fact that there is no room among them for admiration and respect for the words of the one and only truth that was once put into the mouth of a Galilean peasant.

The beast will receive from them exactly what is due to him¹.

¹ Revelation 13:1-18; Ezekiel 29:18-21



*Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins,
who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.
Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent.
For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them,
but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps.
Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep.
But at midnight there was a shout, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him."
Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.
The foolish said to the prudent,
"Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out."
But the prudent answered, "No, there will not be enough for us and you too;
go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves."
And while they were going away to make the purchase,
the bridegroom came, and those who were ready
went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut.
Later the other virgins also came, saying, "Lord, lord, open up for us."
But he answered, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you."
Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.*

Matthew 25:1-13

GOLD FOR THE BOLD

The saleswoman looked weary and a little embarrassed by my presence. The bread that she handed me bore the same price as it had for a long time, written with two big digits: a one and a seven. I was her regular and kind customer exclusively because of this bread.

I guess she knew that, because her face displayed resentment and discouragement when she mentioned that it was the last time that I was getting my favorite loaf. Now it was to be on subscription and the saleswoman wasn't sure if she would be ordering it at all, as if she could no longer afford to credit the purchases of the – few after all – clients whom she provided with this batch – exceptionally good, but hard to get.

She said *it was hard, the times were hard*. She looked the other way, troubled, as if she was ashamed of wanting to earn a living and a decent sustenance, and this bread cost her too much effort. She was quite pretty, so it was fairly easy for me not to show her sympathy in her perplexity. I didn't ask whether it was one advance payment, or some installments.

"It's not for me anyway," I thought. "But why? Why am I to again forsake with sadness this place, one of the few that I enter gladly? Why doesn't it pay for that woman to order something that I would walk through the whole city on foot in search of? Has she even ever tried this bread? I doubt it. She wouldn't be explaining herself to me."

Suddenly I saw the baker, stealthily making his way through the night like a criminal – he was almost naked, with just some sheet tied around his waist, as if he was covering his body not out of shame, but out of consideration for the belated passers-by. Anyway, I don't know, maybe he needed it for something¹.

There was no doubt about it: he was hiding. He would change his whereabouts, and even his identity, so that some guardians of lawfulness wouldn't catch him at shady and illegal dealings in grace. He was fast and elusive to human hands – like a fish; one could tell that he valued his thankless job. A born craftsman – one would like to say. He even

¹ John 13:4-5

made it without a helper. He was making and tirelessly distributing his merchandise, as if he never intended to use the services of merchants and middlemen.

I grasped in a moment why the saleswoman avoided my gaze and offered me, as if in passing, images that were supposed to justify her decision in my eyes. She didn't like this baker. She preferred merchandise about and for which one didn't have to ask¹, and he was like a ghost – unpredictable and inexorable. The thought of his unrelenting, secret slavish toil was all the more troubling to her conscience. So troubling that sometimes she wished that he had never been born.

The baker was a poor man, indeed, a little crazy, because instead of delivering his merchandise the way that other wholesale traders and producers did – in broad daylight and upon receipt – he insisted to give out bread by night, for free, to everyone he met. Just as if he renounced himself.

She had to exert herself a lot to have this titbit, sought-for by gourmets, also on her modest shelf. So she tried to extract the loaves from night tramps, to whom they were sort of falling from the sky. She was telling each one:

*"Give it to me, and I will pay you its price in silver."*²

She disguised herself well for these night expeditions; she meticulously put on makeup, so that no one would notice her sallow complexion and the flush that inevitably betrayed her excitement³, so none of the ragamuffins leaning against the weak street lamps made a complaint or cursed her. On the contrary, it was said:

"What a good and generous lady. We had nothing, and now, at least, we have a little money. How obliging she is – she doesn't mind doing this at night ... And what manners – quite royal, not like that cranky baker, forcing upon us some bread with anguish in his voice. He would probably have killed us if we didn't take it. But we've done him the favor. Let this weirdo know that even beggars can afford a good deed. Let him think that what he does

¹ Amos 8:4-12

² 1 Kings 21:1-7

³ Proverbs 7:6-23

is worth something in our eyes. Maybe it will make it easier to this moron. One has to be a human. At last, this beautiful and merciful lady noticed us. It's good that at least in her eyes we too are worth something¹. Finally we can enter a shop now. We will wipe the smiles from our neighbors' faces when they see us with shopping bags. We will show them what we're made of!"

I never paid for this bread – I had no such intention. The saleswoman knew that I knew that this bread was for free and charging anything for it was unlawful – one didn't need to smile, say "thank you" or oblige oneself. So I would come and take it, and she would give it to me without a word – after all, she knew God's law as well. Her only payment was the fact that it lay among other batches with other prices and among hundreds of various wares in beautiful and ugly packages, so that everyone who saw it would think to himself:

"My God, how much I want this bread – I'm so hungry and it's lying there on the shelf. I can't just take it, can I? That would be dishonest. This woman is working hard for her sustenance. I must somehow earn it, deserve it, make up with my wife and apologize to the boss, find a job, start a new life. I have to stop rummaging through trash, because you can find everything there, but no money. I have to stop bumming around at night and at least try to look decent, because otherwise they will drive me away before I gather the courage to steal it."

I thought that it was, after all, ungenerous of her. I knew that this bread was already paid for – much more than the Rockefeller Institute could give. But others don't know that and even though they look at this costly loaf, the thought doesn't even cross their minds to say:

"Give it to me. Give it to me now! I'm hungry."

They are so well-mannered that if a raven shoved a piece of bread in their face, it would be to them too black to be real. They tied their hands with a compliant waiting for a stroke of fate², because they are flattered,

¹ Galatians 4:17; 6:12-14

² Isaiah 65:11-12; Zephaniah 1:11-14

and not struck, by the judgment of the rich who consider them as sheep to be slaughtered.

That's why I decided to follow the example of that baker, so that, in a dark night, at least some would get at least a crumb of this bread. I will wake the drunkards sitting in gates, pull pilferers and pimps by the arm and compel women of easy virtue, I will be importunate and shameless.

I will run through all the backstreets of the great city of fornication and push to all the outlaws a bite of this heavenly baking with the words:

*"Take and eat, all of you. All of you!
This is my body, which is given for you."*

... let this merchant of the Word of God perish miserably, and her disgraceful dealings come to light with the coming day.

Since that time I have plenty of bread, because I'm doing exactly what that baker whom I saw did. But when it does happen that I suffer from hunger, I call him, and he comes right away and says:

*"Here you are, eat your fill, don't leave any of it until morning¹,
for I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

This slave reminds me of someone. Someone very faithful and beautiful. He once told me a word about the Father, and I believed Him, because as He spoke, shackles suddenly fell from my hands and legs, and the iron band, put on the biggest villains on earth, let go. He assured me that the Father had work even for the meanest ones. And I had already almost lost hope that someone would tell me:

*"Come, I need you². You will get a whole denarius in gold.
Just remember: Gold is for the bold who go after the heavens
and don't sell the secrets they were entrusted with to the enemy."*

* * *

I have met the baker recently. He was busy. There were fewer and fewer freeloaders and he had to post his ads on the Internet among millions of useless pieces of information about this vale, bought and sold for a pittance.

¹ Exodus 16:16-21

² Deuteronomy 28:64-68

*"I will save a soul without any qualms.
I ensure clothing, board and accommodation,
and a one-way ticket."*

It's hard to believe, but that's how (roughly) these inconspicuous, shocking announcements sounded. I have never known anyone who would abase himself so much. But he knows well the great worth of a life and a glimmer of hope given to those bereft of honor for a moribund corpse.

These workers of the last hour will follow into the footsteps of the baker, the tireless helper of people of great faith. They won't need explaining for the hundredth time what is faith, baptism, conversion, who is God, who are the angels and principalities, and how to find the way to the holy mountain, to the city where a brother isn't betrayed for a hundred working days' wages.

They will show up like an army to a roll-call of the fallen¹. And the works of the traffickers of human beings² and jewels of the dead will burn with their own fire of accursed talkativeness³, and their fierce and clamorous kindliness will gnash its teeth over the rapturous ones, who don't forget about the orders issued by the Almighty:

*"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone,
A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed.
He who believes in it will not be disturbed."*⁴

When the cry: *"Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him."*⁵ reaches human ears, the scales of heavy sleep will fall from their eyes and the train of virgins will prepare for the way. Some of them will know the baker, other ones – only the shop shelves with everything from soup to nuts, for they had sold the bread for silver in order to procure for themselves a small joy and consolation.

They won't partake in the great one, because the companions of their earthly woes will send them where they came from – to the devil, manfully countering another temptation on the narrow way of faith:

¹ Nahum 2:3-13

² Deuteronomy 24:7; Revelation 18:7-13

³ Nahum 2:13; 3:13-19

⁴ Isaiah 28:16; Psalms 118:17-23;

Matthew 21:42-46;

Zechariah 4:8-14; 10:1-6; 12:1-6;

Revelation 11:3-13

⁵ Matthew 25:1-13

*Few lend (but fools)
Their working tools.*¹

Soon after that, the blessed ones will hear the angels' choirs and the sound of the King's harp, and none of their mouths will utter the sorcerer's incantation:

*"Mirror, mirror on the wall, ain't I the fairest of us all?"*²

For on this earth the prudent virgins dream only of this wedding, which will unite the guests, witnesses and the wedded for ages. God will reward them for their stubbornness and perseverance in faith in the most beautiful of tales of the princess, the prince and the dreadful dragon thrown into the abyss³.

October 3rd, 1999



Exposition

This story is an exact illustration of the intent that called the book *Jesus wanted* into existence. If, therefore, anyone feels like openly questioning the *legal basis* of my announcement, he would make a correct choice in trying to prove the absurdity of the proposition seeking merchants of the Word of God in the dealers from Jesus' parable about the ten virgins, and in the retort given to the foolish ones by the prudent – a rebuttal, worthy of great faith, of the intent of the evil one.

Every opponent of this proposition will, however, face the need of explaining the role of the dealers, which is strange here, and he won't be able to redeem his skin with anything more expensive than the suggestion, symptomatic of hypocrites, that Jesus didn't have to know exactly what He was saying, or that He left to his hearers a significant liberty in interpreting just these words.

¹ Matthew 25:8-9; quote by Thomas Tusser

² James 1:22-26; 3:13-18

³ Isaiah 14:3-27; Luke 10:17-20

Such apostasy will also be consigned to the grave by the discovering of a very big contrast with which the Master undoubtedly wanted to highlight the fact that, apart from some appearances of negligible importance, the prudent virgins have nothing in common with the foolish ones.

That is why the adjective denoting prudence¹ – as well as attention, which is always valuable in the eyes of the Galilean – is accompanied by a reference to such completely different traits of the mind as: *stupor*, (moral) *callousness*, *inadvertence* or even *insanity*². These aren't tokens of *reformable beings*, living in the real world and seeking in it signs or norms of the Kingdom of God. They rather denote a severe impairment of cognitive powers, an imminent inability to follow the guidelines of a reasonable, or even only honest will.

In the exegetical standards, the lack of clarifications for the range of meanings of the adjectives *prudent* and *foolish* serves as a shabby veil for the altogether unfounded conviction that those *foolish virgins could, through wise counsel, become wise*. It's shabby because, even if we adopt this moralizing convention in spite of Jesus, who wasn't a moralizer, it will still be short of a concept explaining the origin of the oil in the lamps of the more sober representatives of the more beautiful, but weaker sex, and with that even a reasonable explanation of the purpose that the oil was to serve.

Whereas a simple identification of the dealers with people preaching Christ for profit³ or – as the Apostle puts it – through vain-glory⁴, explains at the same time why a person honestly awaiting salvation should strive to take care of what belongs to him, and not of what belongs to someone else (the gift of the Holy Spirit, promised by faith, facilitates these efforts considerably). It also displays the thievish attempts at the good promised to the faithful who understand well that the need for solidarity invoked by the foolish virgins is an attempt to extort a part of the invisible testimony of truth.

For the prudent virgins *know well what's going on* – just like John knew that well⁵ – without unnecessary dilemmas they send their companions back to the place where they received their first and only les-

1 gr. φρονιμος

2 gr. μωρος

3 2 Corinthians 2:14-17; 4:1-2

4 Philippians 2:3

5 1 John 2:18-21

sons of truth about the coming bridegroom, unknown to their hearts and thoughts. It's not *good advice*, by no means – it is the apostolic *wish of death*¹. Nominal Christians are offended by it to this very day, as most of them revile the truth because it is out of their way.

The Reader may also take into consideration the fact that the dismissal of the foolish virgins by the bridegroom himself sounds exactly like the verdict which is to – in due time – reach the ears of many prophets, teachers, miracle workers, exorcists, healers and other declared *acquaintances of the Righteous One* who gave up on *personal care*, giving access to spiritual philistinism and overt mendacity².

What is more, the ruling of the Judge of Israel in this matter, drafted by Matthew, is accompanied by a related comparison of the image of the wisdom of a builder erecting his house on a rock with the foolishness and thoughtlessness of the one designating the place for the foundation *on the beach*³.

In a word, the foolish virgins are those who obtained the right of God's children by the belief that it is worthwhile to solicit that right at a market stall, not asking the stewards of truth troublesome disciples' questions.

As for me, I didn't look for the answers to my questions in places even resembling the appearance of a marketplace. The Reader won't find them there either, because they threaten the most vital interest of the *Christian stock exchange* and my access means to them a risk of a serious downturn of their market ratings.

December 24th, 2011

¹ 1 Corinthians 16:22; Galatians 1:6-10

² Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 13:24-30

³ Matthew 7:24-27



When they came to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?" He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?" When Peter said, "From strangers," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are exempt. However, so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for you and Me."

Matthew 17:24-27

THE ANGLER AND THE WORM

The greatness of the Messiah was undeniable. Also to Peter. Jesus knowingly accommodated this human desire for worship and submission towards the Savior of the world, who drew the disciples to himself by his majesty and power¹.

Peter was proud to belong to a truly royal entourage, and the words directed to him by the Master washed over him like a precious ointment, setting him apart from the lot like a prince from a lame fairy tale. Peter didn't know yet that he was ugly and that he wouldn't obtain princely charm by correcting the image of his Teacher and keeping to run to meet the expectations of the King that he presumed.

Jesus looked straight into the eyes of death. Its snares surrounded Him and his disciples on all sides with a tight cordon of sneaky accusations. He knew well that the murderous blows were aimed at Him and that the disciples wouldn't fend them off if they didn't remember how their Chief had fought for them.

When the temple tax collectors threw mud² at the spotless whiteness of the Righteous One's robe, Peter didn't even think to oppose the blasphemers who denied tax relief to a healer and miracle worker. Of course, money wasn't their concern. If this had been so, they would have turned straight to the culprit. But they didn't have the courage – like the ruler of the synagogue, accusing people who were healed on the Sabbath of an infringement of the provisions of the law³.

Peter came to Jesus dirty. *“Of course He doesn't pay the two-drachma of yours. If you knew Him like I do, you would pay Him yourselves instead of demanding money.”* The thoughts of the Apostle weren't better, nor were they different from the thoughts of the other disciples who soon after asked Jesus who was the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven⁴.

Peter didn't understand yet that the Lord was watching over his steps not because of him, but because of himself. He would have readily be-

¹ John 13:13

² Matthew 17:24

³ Luke 13:10-17

⁴ Matthew 18:1-5

come indignant and complained at the heartlessness and callousness of the officials, but he was stopped at the door by a gentle word of the Lord, upholding his small, unpurified thought¹. *"From strangers. The kings of the earth collect customs from those whom they rule over – from strangers."*

Jesus was holding this flopping fish firmly – like many others who swallowed the sharp hook of the fishing rod of the Almighty and didn't even know what was pulling them to the shore of the sea of human beings. Right now Peter was only to remember the fact that his Master saw one reason why the free sons of this earth should meet the demands of its kings and governors².

He was also to remember that their lusts are insatiable³, for they are consumed by blasphemous fire which follows them and blinds them with rebellion against the decrees of the living God concerning their own lives.

For the time being, satanic pride didn't allow Peter to resign from the troublesome role of a *defender of the Righteous One*, for whose life he soon after wanted to give his own dear, but impure soul⁴. But the memory of that strange catch from the Master's command survived the terror of his disgrace and death until the time when the Holy Spirit assured Peter that it's not good when the Son of God is dying on the cross, but it's better for everyone than if another villain who hates his executioners and doesn't pay contributions for the renovation of the temple would be hanging there.

Nowadays, Christians are *free*, but they don't know what for and on whose account. They demand *merely* the recognition of their rights, and they consider the sufferings caused by their own abuses their glory. They draw from the riches of this world until they're drunk, but they wonder at the fact that the word of the Lord doesn't protect even what they own. They worry like children only when they fail at something, instead of rejoicing that their God succeeds at everything He does and fulfills it to the letter. They frantically put their own words and thoughts into his mouth, as if by doing that they were able to escape the just judgment of their own unbelief.

¹ Matthew 17:25-27

² Matthew 17:27

³ Proverbs 27:19-22

⁴ Luke 22:32-34; John 13:36-38

They are almost ready to curse those who are not moved by savior-like stunts, pirouettes of virtuosos of ballroom dancing on ice and spiritual pyrotechnics shows. As if there was too little space in the world for ladies' aerobic courses, discussion clubs and rural women's associations, for beauty contests and oratorical displays, for wellness salons and erotic massage parlors, for lengthy TV series and for good old westerns, where even seasoned shooters hide behind cornerstones – for all that the wise man takes in at a single glance and says: "*Vanity of vanities.*"

Still, Christians wish to have these attractions also at Church. For that purpose, they try various strategies: military, mercantile, theatrical, scenic, related to sports and the circus. And they resent the fact that the popular testimonies of their faith are ridiculed and parodied by true soldiers, merchants, actors, stars of the stage, sports masters and circus tricks experts.

Instead of peacefully casting their fishing rods, they quarrel with each other and become indignant at the ever solidary collectors, as if the latter were able to do something more than to recover dues. They don't want to amaze them with a shekel taken out of the mouth of the fish caught at the Lord's order.

They don't even remember that the Lord saw nothing improper in the expectations of the collectors of the temple tax. He only taught pranks – not too costly after all – on the behalf of the image of the Uncreated One. For in Capernaum Peter met servants who were sure of his haughtiness and arrogance, and they only wanted to use it against the Messiah.

They wouldn't even approach a disciple who is dependable and righteous not because he has their whip over him and their impudent claims in his head, but is like that because he wants to and loves, and hangs like a worm from the fishing rod of the powerful and merciful will of his Savior.

Offence becomes the inglorious share of the community every time its servants forsake the Lord's thought, deriving profits – which they consider indispensable – from participation in management boards of companies of this world. They soon become their puppets, unable to face hypocrisy, the sight of which deters attentive eyes and ears that rightly wonder whether the *servant* is a *lackey*, the *doctor* a *quack*, the *Savior* a *croaker*, the *chief* an *MC*, and the *king* a *bastard*, whether

the lion is a *stuffed toy*, whether the *Great Serpent*¹ sets free, or rather binds, are God's judgments accompanied by applause and laughter in the courtroom, and whether at Church the prophets are the only ones whose mouths ever shut.

Thousands of such stupid, childish questions plague the poor, whose winding road ended on the threshold of a strange place with even stranger words on the wall – words that nowadays no one understands anymore:

*Just as many were astonished at you, My people,
So His appearance was marred more than any man
And His form more than the sons of men.
Thus He will sprinkle many nations,
Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him;
For what had not been told them they will see,
And what they had not heard they will understand.
Who has believed our message?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,
And like a root out of parched ground;
He has no stately form or majesty
That we should look upon Him,
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.
He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
And like one from whom men hide their face
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.²*

The thirsty keep stumbling right next to the well, saying to themselves:

“No, it's not here. Let no one ever speak to me about the cross again. I thought that Christ ... that maybe this one would tell me something, give me something. Nothing great, just a little hope, such true human hope that the one who has the last word in this world is the one who once said: «Let there be...» Simply, «Let there be light.» Reportedly, it came to be then. But that's not here, not now. And maybe it was just a dream?...”

¹ Matthew 10:16

² Isaiah 52:13-15; 53:1-12

God will uphold those who will think that there must after all be such a place and time, even on this earth, where people don't frown at strangers and don't indulge themselves at the cost of those who are absent. He will, however, overthrow those who stand in the way of the least ones and pride themselves only in the fact that they themselves are in accordance with the small law and they don't have to listen attentively to the Lord's orders anymore.

Peter's Teacher knew that the earth cannot bear up under slaves who, like He himself, become kings¹, and tries to distance from her this will of the living God with imputations of the unorthodoxy of his servants. He could have easily demonstrated to the collectors their own faults – if only He wanted to defend his shady reputation. It was as easy to Him as sizing up in one fatherly glance his conceited disciple who had much more reasons than Him to timely make the yearly payment for the renovation of the temple.

The charge that the Jews were bringing against the Messiah at every step was also serious this time, because it would undermine with its treacherous blade the conviction of many witnesses of Christ's anguish that the teaching about God's kingdom didn't turn against the faith of their fathers.

In Jerusalem Paul had – with the help of the brothers – to face a similar accusation of contempt for customs and this free son didn't have to be convinced for a long time of the need for public amends for the Mosaic law². The Apostle perfectly understood the new law of grace, the gist of which was to become the removing of obstacles on the way to heaven so that they wouldn't be an obstruction both to those who know the law of Moses and to those who have never heard of it³.

Of course, the testimony of Paul's respect for his native customs, which he delivered personally in the temple of Jerusalem, wasn't enough to the local guardians of the rule of law. He was dragged outside⁴, but the groundless rage and disdain of the crowd, stirred up by the Jews, revealed to the attentive witnesses a picture of a scorned *outcast and worm* impaled with the hard sting of God's Word. Many a stupefied fish

¹ Proverbs 30:21-23

² Acts 21:20-26

³ 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

⁴ Acts 21:27-36

relished this faithful *bait* before it felt a strong pull and saw the Angler standing over it.

Disgust and murderous lusts that were from then on to be awakened by numerous stewards of grace often turned out salutary to all who, one fine day, abhorred life and their own sinful bodies. Each of them asked himself more or less like this:

"Is there anybody in this world who will tell me why it is so cold and dark here, why am I not to cover my face from humiliation and spitting and give my back to those who strike me¹, why am I to calmly look at these frights, contorted by contempt and malignant smirks? Is there anyone who will tell me one true word and pull me out of here, because I can't even swim and if not for this hook, I would immediately go down?"

The answer was faster than the question and sounded like the voice of the true Father:

"I am. Don't be afraid, my little worm; you see, the fish are too smart to fall for an empty hook. Something has to hang from it – some Paul or Peter, or something equally hideous and useless to all. Only then some of them leap on such great bait and my sting pierces their gaping mouths, and the fishing rod pulls them to the shore. Later my angels divide them into good and bad ones². In the mouths of the former fish there are coins closing the mouths of ubiquitous tax collectors. In the jaws of the latter ones there isn't anything and such are being thrown away by the angels, for my Father loves even those awful officials who are incited against Me by Satan, who eloquently assures them that Jesus of Nazareth had on his conscience some great debt towards the noble, charming and innocent humanity.

And the fish who have nothing for the representatives of the law, but brag and wipe the floor with my name, are simply liars³ who will be justly judged by my word. For the Father told Me to say on earth that people would turn away from the truth and give heed to

¹ Isaiah 50:4-11

² Matthew 13:47-50; 22:8-14

³ 1 John 2:3-4; 2:9,11,19,29

fairy tales, and deceive many by their hypocrisy and self-worship in order not to suffer persecution for my name¹.

They won't care in the least when some assessor accuses them of falsehood and lawlessness. They will make holy faces and graciously pray for their persecutor and enemy of God's righteousness who doesn't understand that they live by grace and don't like to be reminded of some negligible trifles².

I will leave them to themselves and scatter them like those trifles of theirs, but with my faithful worms I will also catch such fish which will always smile beautifully at the temple tax collectors who have many an extortion and holy blackmail on their usurious consciences."

Undoubtedly many a heartless guard of a stone temple will be surprised when he unexpectedly gets a coin that tells him that Christ is a great and generous Lord of those small and poor people³ he can't even hold a candle to, because in their place he would never have afforded such a gesture.

November 8th, 1999



Exposition

It's difficult to resist the impression that the event in Capernaum couldn't have been reported by a more fitting person than a former civil servant. Perhaps it could have only been Matthew to whom Peter's reaction to the question of the temple tax collectors could have seemed so inappropriate to make him want to place it among other testimonies of unknowing entanglement of the disciples in lies about the Lord's servant. Its value consists in the fact that it records a clear picture of the still relevant discord between the self-esteem of many believers and the conviction of few

¹ 1 Timothy 4:1-7; 2 Timothy 4:3-4;
Galatians 6:12

² Proverbs 28:4-7

³ Proverbs 28:9-16

of the absolute seriousness of the Master's instructions and admonitions, in the face of which the former fades substantially.

In their preposterous expectations, accounted for by incorrect orientation of their efforts, Christians rarely return in their thoughts to the essence and conditions of the Father's blessing intended for those who follow into the footsteps of his Son. For they usually lack patience for the perpetual malcontents pointing out the shortcomings of their guides, which indirectly prove the unreliability of their solemn professions of the purity of the Righteous One's motives and the causal power of his commandments.

Whereas even human experience demonstrates that a child who has a bad father earnestly desires to give expression to its certitude that other children have a worse one – in order to have a reason to boast at the cost of the sons and daughters heedless of the fatherly teachings. Jesus repeatedly tried to suggest to the disciples that the election for apostles didn't involve the participation of their will and if they were to bring glory to the Originator of their faith, they had to strive – like He did – for their mission not to exclude anyone for reasons that mean nothing measured up against eternity.

Obviously, nowadays, when lawlessness is plainly visible, one doesn't need great arrogance to – like Peter in Capernaum – snort at those who turn to us with weird grievances, as if what is dear to them had to be such to us as well. The temple tax, however, concerned everyone and its annual payment was a rather inexpensive sign of respect for native customs – so the question of the collectors didn't have to provoke Peter's bewilderment at the thought that anyone dared to point out to his Lord such a trifle as negligence in that matter.

But the matter didn't concern whether someone was paying or not – for perhaps even collectors sometimes turned a blind eye at the sight of insolvent poverty – it was about whether someone who passed for the Son of God could extol himself above the law and the Old Testament regulations.

Peter's cocky answer was in no way a testimony of his Teacher's moral deterioration. However, the conscious resistance against the evident expectations of the guardians of the law from the side of the people who, at first sight, lacked nothing, would unavoidably have to – through the opi-

nion-forming power of the priests – undermine in the eyes of many the credibility of Jesus’ ministry as a messenger of the Father. Here also Peter didn’t demonstrate care for the spotless image of the Messiah, because he didn’t understand yet how much he owed to his humble ministry and why he should abase himself in front of the enemies of his Lord.

Flat images of slanderers don’t help in obtaining more distinctive contours of the figure of the Righteous One. After all, even the more noble Gentiles would rightly deem the practice of publicly degrading and discrediting the assets of the adversary a serious breach of the rules of a fair fight. Nevertheless, precisely such unconstraint has been characteristic for Christians for times immemorial. Their apologists are unceremoniously intruding the territory of the enemies of the cross with files of paper evidence against those who trespass against them, as if they entertained a not entirely justified hope that the adversary of God will yield to the argumentation that crushes his reasons.

Whereas in fact the opposite is happening: it is the enemy who’s triumphing over the infertile loquacity of the over-enlightened. For Christians don’t understand that in order to fight for faith, one doesn’t need to meet the passionate expectations of people devoid of truth (for example, by engaging in scholarly disputes with them, which is playing into their hands). One needs to do by himself what God has commanded, because that’s the only thing that is well paid for.

Of course, when doing that one can be sure that the circle of friends or supporters will suddenly dwindle. Neither will there be anyone left to show thankfulness for the considerable help, for which the means are usually found only when the matter turns out to accommodate the most vital needs of the moment. One can also be sure that true and very close enemies will become really dangerous and inhumane overnight and that they will start to make use of arguments known only to prisoners. One can, however, also be sure that grace won’t abandon those who hold their tongues and their swords and don’t delude themselves that the representatives of the law will surely turn a blind eye to their liabilities.

For when it comes to this delusion, it is impossible to knock out its teeth or close its jaw with evidence that it is wrong – it just isn’t, its blows are always spot-on and unrelenting, and its poison penetrates exactly where it guarantees a result. It can, however, be outsmarted – not

very impressively: without the spotlight, setting apart from above an artificial circle of incidental interests, without great investments and great words – by simply putting on a fitting garment, ordinarily, a little foolishly believing that if one acquires the characteristics of that Man and shows down-to-earth complaisance to the bothersome guests, even such as Matthew, the customs officer, they will be able to notice the measure from which, after all, their lives depend as well.

I think that also today many sympathizers of Peter's nonchalance are successfully deprived of credibility by Satan when their fervent confession isn't accompanied by attention in exploring the thoughts and guidelines of the wise man from Nazareth. And rightly so – because by their intemperance they take away glory from God the Father and the Son, who has never once overstepped the code from the mount of Sinai – not so that the builders of faith would frolic like monkeys on the frames of its doctrines, but so that they would want and be able to put what they're preaching into action, for it's only liars who can't do that.

The heroism of the contemporary teachers in combating errors and distortions of people who have no idea what they're talking about successfully turns the attention of many believers away from the destination of their pilgrimage. It does that by imposing on them their conviction, bulky and sanctioned with greatness by publications, that if they will be able to prove with their intellectual acrobatics to a Buddhist or Catholic that he is an ignoramus or a liar, they will earn with that feat a reward from the hands of the Righteous One.

And if they evade the expectations of the representatives of earthly power, mean in their eyes, but in fact reasonable, they will prove the shrewdness and humility that were recommended and testified to by their Master's life and word.

But even if they lie their way out of their most obvious obligations and convince the pope to do farm work, they won't get away from the inexorable *Collector of temple fees*, who, at the Judgment, won't look at their business cards, but at their garments.

And this garment will only be worn by those who, one day, went fishing and didn't come back – not because they got a taste for great catches of fish ripping the nets, but because the Angler, made repugnant to them by liars, convinced them in a few words that fish don't like worms with-

out reason and don't easily fall for an empty hook, but what also might turn out to be a contributing factor is a strong line, invisible to their greedy eyes, and the Spirit of God moving over the waters and enshrouding the patient Hunter of souls. For the Lord didn't order anyone to chase after fish, but to abide fixedly at the not-too-comfortable post, in the hope that at least in one eye the worms impaled on the sting lack nothing.

Because just as people sometimes feel in the water as in their element, some worms feel there as in heaven, even though they wouldn't be able to convince many that the dignity of a bait speaks for itself, because it isn't covered by scales, glistening like a rainbow, of creatures mute to the Father. Their value is measured by Him not by the fact that they swallowed the hook (for on earth nobody needs to be induced to disastrous passions), but by whether they have in their mouths a small fee as a justification in the eyes of all *Jesus Christ's creditors* who are far from the mainland of faith in the existence of the Promised Land.

And only those will have it who won't see the enemy of truth in any collector – they will sooner spot him at the bottom of their own souls, which aren't secretly flattered by the testimony of a customs officer named Matthew, who was bribed by God. The Master convinced them also of the fact that if they really can't afford paying for someone else's sanctities, they ought to fairly establish who paid for them and why it should be so expensive.

They weren't, after all, too beautiful or too wise, or too merciful, and sometimes they even forgot their common decency, as if they were being raised in a pigsty before they saw the light of day. They just didn't point fingers at anyone, unless he got in their way, they weren't looking for adversaries – it was the adversary who was looking for them, roaring wounded and harrowing from rage, because they didn't take tips and didn't bow to the earth in front of the principalities – only as much so that the emperor wouldn't take offence at God, not having a reason to complain about Him – about the fact that He gave to small people a great power without his knowledge and consent.

*Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus,
and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw.
All the crowds were amazed, and were saying,
"This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?"
But when the Pharisees heard this, they said,
"This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons."
And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them,
"Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste;
and any city or house divided against itself will not stand.
If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself;
how then will his kingdom stand? If I by Beelzebul cast out demons,
by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges.
But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God,
then the kingdom of God has come upon you.
Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property,
unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.
He who is not with Me is against Me;
and he who does not gather with Me scatters.
Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people,
but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.
Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him;
but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit,
it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come."*

SNAKE'S EGG

It was convenient to the Pharisees to think that the demon-possessed were weighed down by God's just judgment for their alleged wickedness. Even if they had in front of them someone born blind, they would repeat their tune to everyone: "*He suffers because he sinned*," so that nobody would dare to doubt the seriousness of their office¹.

The sacrifices of the people received by their greedy hands were to propitiate God's anger resting even on those who hadn't spoken a single word in their lives. The demon-possessed weren't able to meet the requirements of the grace rationed out by the priests. They would bite, roll their eyes, toss like fish taken out of the water, lacerate their bodies, hurl curses, throw themselves at their feet, beg for mercy or sit mute, blind and deaf at the thresholds of temples or at the sides of roads, where they have been banished by the voices of reason of their God-fearing families.

Some of them have never seen the light, never heard and never made a human sound and only merciful prayers and efforts of the witnesses of their poverty could give them hope for daily bread and a corner where the plagues, spared to the eyes and ears of the righteous, wouldn't reach them. Only a small part of that margin could benefit from the services of the Jewish exorcists – and that provided that there was someone to pay for them.

People have always been afraid of evil spirits, but rarely to such a degree as to lose their minds in their presence, so this time the witnesses must have been a little surprised by the Pharisaic suspicion that the Messiah had a pact with the devil² – at least to the extent that they were amazed by the miraculous healing of their kinsman performed in their sight.

Even if before it was hard for them to show enthusiasm to this miracle worker, the piety of those people – awaiting the Messiah after all – had to be moved by this free intercession of the servant before his Lord, who was unknown to them.

¹ John 9:2-34

² Matthew 12:22-24

Jesus used this splinter in the Pharisees' divided minds, troublesome to them, reining in the barking pack with correct reasoning. In his eyes, however, those who saw in Him a messenger of hell deluding the little ones with miracles had no reasons to fear.

For sooner or later He would have to explain to Beelzebub his famed perversity which unties the bonds imposed by his master¹. In any case, whoever He was², the Pharisees should rather have rejoiced at the sight of a miracle in the inevitable fall of someone who was contradicting himself, and whom they so sincerely and passionately hated, and not show concern *whether for sure this devil would perish in the majesty of their law*.

Jesus left the accusers to the certainly not very merciful judgment of their sons, whose consciences were by no means prejudiced by taking money for exorcising spirits³. In their frenzy, the Pharisees overlooked that they would bring upon themselves thunders from the mouths of those whose hope for profit from the official practice would be lost if people after all *wished to get healed cheaper*, not asking themselves any more *whether life and health conforms to the Jewish law, troublesome to them*, but asking another question – whether God Almighty is as jealous as the countenances of the luminaries of the rule of law, contorted by wrath, would indicate.

The Pharisees overestimated the faithfulness of their flock, trying to force their measure upon its eyes and expecting that the people *wouldn't after all love Beelzebub for such unprecedented, although illegal, mercy*.

Jesus got his mendacious judges to understand that the coming of the Kingdom of God was a fact that couldn't be denied without departing from one's senses. For if they held Him for a thief of God's glory, this god of theirs had either to be small, or incapacitated by some terrible infirmity if he allowed for such disgraceful infamies in their sight.

It is a dictate of common sense to surrender to an occupant who hands out the plunder taken from the strong man whom he bound⁴. But it was just this salutary prudence that was lacking in these *gatekeepers of knowledge*⁵, who, for some strange reasons, warned others against

¹ Matthew 12:25-26

² John 10:24-39

³ Matthew 12:27

⁴ Matthew 12:29

⁵ Luke 11:52

this calculating and heartless degenerate, from whom it was best to stay away.

The words of the Father put into the mouth of his Son were being fulfilled to the letter:

*"He who is not with Me is against Me;
and he who does not gather with Me scatters."¹*

The views of the Pharisees were so twisted and their speech so soaked in venom and bile that the present-day Reader has to be surprised that the Messiah devoted his attention and time to the people who were stumbling blocks to those who wanted only a little respite in the sense that they were only a step, and not an eternity away from their true Father. But the Lord knew that his words were to become support for those who would believe in Him only after his death, so that the one who would become credible in their eyes wouldn't be the servant of mercy, but his powerful Principal, loosing the bonds of death by grace.

Had Jesus wanted, at that time, to say what He saw, the bodies of those scoffers and blasphemers would have crumbled from fear in the blink of an eye – not only not having managed to confess their sins, but even to think about the need for making amends and paying back their own debts. But the Savior listened attentively to the voice coming to Him from above² and knew that it wasn't time yet for a final reckoning, even if He had to die from the hands of his compatriots, experiencing their insults, grimaces and slanders on the way.

There was only one thing He warned his listeners (who sometimes to this day don't care whether the demon is cast out by an evil or a good spirit) against. He warned them that when they file complaints, they should direct them to the right person and that they shouldn't be spreading news from lands they haven't been to, because rumors of the Father's errors place even the noblest denunciators at risk of injury or death – and that regardless of their memorial merits for humanity³.

For there can really be only one God – and not necessarily such an abhorrent one as to blame humans for the lack of the Spirit of God. He only

¹ Matthew 12:30

² John 8:25-42

³ Matthew 12:30-39

blames them for opposing the person who serves, heals, helps, encourages and admonishes in this Spirit those who are still looking for pears on a willow tree and blaming the pear tree for *not having those furry catkins that are harbingers of the awakening of nature*.

For it's only the Holy Spirit who doesn't allow the re-accommodation of guests uninvited by the Father in the room that was swept for Him – not because He feels tight, but because He doesn't waste his breath, and only the work of the Faithful and Righteous One is given a wide berth by jealous and all-knowing tongues of slanderers.

It befitted Jesus to remind them right there that the inhabitants of Nineveh hadn't been very surprised by Jonah's news¹, for the thought of improving one's ways is alien to hardly anybody, especially when a sword hangs above one's head. He also recalled a certain wise king to whom people had been coming from far and wide only to cast a glance at the splendor of his court and pay tribute to his insight and prudence².

But Jesus also stressed that their greatness pales in comparison to the servient greatness of the King of kings and prophet³ who didn't fulminate in his spirit – like Jonah – against his Principal for delaying the just verdict, exposing his messenger to disgrace and ridicule of noble and abject defenders of peace on earth⁴.

Until the end of her days, the queen of Sheba was to satiate herself with the experiences from the court of Solomon, who didn't despise gold, spices and the charm of a thousand women⁵. In Nineveh, the memory of a great penance was also to cool down only with the people who were shaken to the quick by the specter of destruction. But the terror and splendor of God's judgments never was to obscure a certain strange, not all too impressive and not all too terrible figure of the Galilean peasant whose testimony convinced many that in order to go to heaven it is enough to have just a ... little bit of reason received as a gift⁶.

Because God the Father waits for those who will not despise the ministry even of a *Beelzebub's kinsman*, provided that he looks honest enough and doesn't demand miracles from the people, but performs them.

¹ Jonah 3:4-9

² 1 Kings 10:23-25

³ Matthew 12:41-42

⁴ Jonah 3:10; 4:1-4,9-11

⁵ 1 Kings 10:10-27

⁶ 1 John 5:19-21; Ephesians 2:4-10

November 9th, 1999*Exposition*

The purport of Jesus' famed lecture constituting the answer to the Pharisees' slander usually escapes the attention of people bound by the yoke of the ruler of this world. Not in the least because of the alleged obscureness and entanglement of the Master's statement, explicitly proving the internal contradiction of the accusation of a pact with the devil. On the contrary – it's the human thoughts that are so jumbled and impure that they insult the Creator. So, on the whole, readers lose sight of the purpose of the speech and are more willing to see in the Savior their valiant and noble, but a little distant defender, than a credible and relentless witness of the wickedness of all people that is known by the Father.

Even if we omitted the purport of the stanza spoken that very same day by the sea¹, which was to explain to the disciples the meaning of the parables, it is impossible to overlook that the reactions of Jesus' close relatives² and – out of consideration for the object of the controversy – the Pharisees weren't too different from the less friendly shouts around the convalescent³ to be able to serve by themselves as a ground for distinguishing goats from sheep⁴.

Open amazement and admiration towards the Miracle Worker, unanimous concern of the family about the status of a *changeling* of Joseph and Mary's son, troublesome to them, as well as the scarcely polished passions of the experts in the law all had as their common ground this human desire, insanely difficult to positively discredit, that the image of the Deity wouldn't effectively compete with, and for sure wouldn't exceed their notions and hopes that they had grown accustomed to.

Had the nameless crowds of the witnesses of the earthly greatness of the Messiah been able to at least partly grasp the arguments of his fam-

¹ Matthew 13:11-15; Jeremiah 17:5-6

² Mark 3:20-31; John 7:2-5

³ Matthew 12:23

⁴ Matthew 25:31-46

ily and the Pharisees, their admiration and perseverance in following the Healer would surely have weakened significantly¹, like the zeal of the disciples from the pages of John's account, ending with a picture of the stones they picked up².

This live and indomitable presence of the Prince of Peace could only open the ears of those most loyal towards the created order, who understand the need to fulfill the law, imperative towards God's requirements³, to the unparalleled dissonance between the measure of human judgments about the messenger of the Father and his own measure⁴.

None of these attentive listeners would have wished to one day become a defendant before earthly tribunals, even, or maybe especially when it would fall to them to justly lavish God's gift.

They would rather consider, hearing the level-headed persuasion of the Teacher directed to infuriated slanderers⁵, whether in order to be an enemy of Jesus one has to do as much as to stand in the company of his open adversaries, and whether it doesn't cost too little to eagerly admit that one has not the slightest doubt that this Man is incarnate power of the word, in the face of which the rancor and claims of the Pharisees aren't worthy of being treated seriously.

Jesus seemed to perfectly understand the scope and meaning of his own judgments. There are few, however, who comprehend how little room for maneuver was left to Him in the service of the Father, telling Him to fight with his word not only with the open resistance and sarcasm of the learned men, but above all with the poisoned fruit of their quackery among those He sought after⁶.

No one was more aware than Him of the danger called the leaven of the Pharisees, consisting in the fact that in the eyes of His adherents the messenger of the Almighty would seem as someone less than a Chief and a Guide. Nevertheless, many from among those who heard his voice could boast in a piety much more perfect than that of the guardians of the law, because the most honest of the teachers weren't at the least bothered – and even sometimes it was a reason to boast – when their disciple exceeded them.

¹ Luke 14:25-26

² John 8:31-59

³ Luke 7:2-8; 23:40-42; Acts 16:27

⁴ John 5:19-27; 17:1-4; Matthew 11:27

⁵ Matthew 12:25-37

⁶ Mark 8:14-21

Jesus had no direct evidence for the credibility of the statement that a disciple isn't greater than the master¹. Besides, I don't think He risked contending it with the *masters*. According to Him, it simply wasn't possible for anyone to exceed Him – by no means because of his famed *megomania*, but because the unprecedented awareness of the seriousness of his calling and separation also made Him special when it comes to the scale of sensations, a small part of which was given to experience by the will of his Empowerer only to those who imitated Him – and not those who developed some view about Him (even very flattering), and unanimously deemed the Pharisees the most disgusting beasts under the sun.

Sharing the views of the Messiah, however, doesn't mean being able to fight with abomination². Hence Jesus' implacability – after the direct answer given to the slanderers He immediately turns to everyone present³, knowing that they are too far in their own eyes from the voracious jealousy of the Pharisees to be able to fully realize the terror of their own situation, which could be compared to unknowingly floating towards powerful and treacherous whirlpools.

The task of the Servant was exactly that – to mark the whitewashed tombs that people walk on, not even sensing the repulsive content of their insides⁴. Jesus intentionally stresses that damnation is a threat to everyone present – not only those who openly demand a sign from Him, testing the Lord's patience, and not because He himself has no intention of driving out all the evil spirits, but because the people themselves, under the influence of their mendacious judges, are prone to seeing a benefactor in every not too costly miracle worker – and that takes away glory from the One and Only.

The inspired Psalmist proclaims that *the zeal for his [God's] house consumes him*⁵ – so his conduct is dictated by the faithfulness towards a greater one, and not by submission or even pandering towards the expectations of the lesser ones⁶. Evil perceived by the eyes of the outsiders is, according to Jesus, trivial, too obvious to be an object of controversy and concern to every sober listener. True and real evil is hidden from

¹ John 13:13-19; 15:19-21

² James 2:19

³ Matthew 12:30-45

⁴ Matthew 23:27-28

⁵ John 2:14-17

⁶ Galatians 4:17; 6:12-14

everyone and Jesus would have succumbed to it, not surprising the witnesses of the Pharisaic chicaneries with a voice much more decisive and authoritative than his greedy interlocutors, non-disinterestedly seeking in Him an insidious swindler, would like to hear.

A false prophet never takes an open stand against any house, city or kingdom¹. He rather offers a small part of knowledge, flattering human vanity in order to sanction his own status of a guardian of the rule of law and purity of customs. For the most part, it conforms to the common, even though not very noble, demand of the earthly reasons of state for him.

It wasn't the first nor the last time that the Pharisees aimed the slander at the crowd – not because they were convinced of the validity of the imputation, but because they heard the question, not at all satisfying to Jesus, from the mouths of the witnesses of the healing:

"This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?"

Yeah, who knows. Not everyone who performs miracles is credible. But from the will of the Father, the one who was to become credible in the eyes of the attentive listeners wasn't the one who slings mud, but the one who rebuts the slander with a dignity of a servant (not a *lord*) of human souls.

The disciples must have attentively watched the reactions of the Pharisees many a time. At the side of the Master they learned, however, to protect with their own bodies the faith of others, to whom the *white-washed tombs of lustfulness* didn't seem so very abominable as to not to greet the executioners of human consciences² in the street and not to make too eager use of their knowledge, impractical when measured up against eternity, and alleged power over the secrets of human hearts.

For the disciples themselves grew accustomed to the fact that their Lord isn't a *prompter of village ignorance*, but its motionless rock with the faces of a lion, an eagle, a bull and ... a man. They also knew that arguments with the creditors of the Son of God don't add to the number of debtors thankful to the Father³, unless it's the Holy Spirit arguing with them⁴.

¹ Matthew 12:25-28

² 2 John 10-11; Philippians 3:2; Revelation 22:15

³ 2 Timothy 2:22-26

⁴ Acts 5:9

Even nowadays the most serious dangers escape the attention of people seduced by the hypocrisy of liars. Their righteousness is merely a disgust of boorishness, hypocrisy and unholy or *too holy* (idealized) images of Jesus of Nazareth. Neither have I heard anywhere the sound of words bearing even the slightest resemblance to the royal phrase:

*"He who is not with Me is against Me;
and he who does not gather with Me scatters."*¹

It is probably because justification by grace has become one of the cheapest wares on this earth, and the shuffling of words and terms the only fitting payment for the harlot². There is, however, a Person who arouses merciless stir and clamor³, crying out to heaven for vengeance, also today. Not because He speaks, but because He hears and sees, and knows who He is⁴, as opposed to multitudes, countless and not too constant in their faith, of adherents owing to God their very spirit of life⁵.

¹ Matthew 12:29-32

² Ezekiel 16:30-41

³ Revelation 16:10-11

⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:11

⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:15-20

YEARNING

In the morning I looked out of the window. The sun was beginning to shine on the nearby slope and the groove formed in its sand where my neighbors' children often played. This time a giant serpent lying in it was slowly unbending, raising his small, ominous head.

The coils of his several dozen feet long body covered with iridescent scales were as thick as a grown man's leg. Its huge mass could be rivaled at most by the sizeable bulldozer heaping up levees in the vicinity – but at the same time, even the most nimble creature wouldn't manage to escape if it happened to be passing near it.

My household wasn't yet awake and it was with difficulty that I succeeded to summon only one of the sisters, who, having rubbed her eyes, caught a glimpse of the crawling tail of the snake. The reptile had just left its lair and was quickly circling the house, heading towards the front.

Haste was expedient, so I got dressed at a pace appropriate for a combat alarm and ran downstairs. The thought of taking an axe, a knife or a rope seemed absurd to me, even though I had enough time to ask myself the question why exactly I was going there and what I was counting on.

Here, at home, time went by differently than on the outside, much slower, and my preparations turned out to be worse than sluggish. When I went outside, it was all over and dusk was falling. At the nearby creek I found the neighbor, who was just finishing throwing bloody shreds of entrails into the water.

He was plainly satisfied with the course of events and wasn't trying to hide his excitement while giving me a detailed account of the fight that our mutual acquaintance had had with the monster. The tone of his voice gave off that characteristic sense of superiority typical of greedy witnesses of unusual events. If not for them, he would have nothing to talk or dream about.

As usually, he wanted to let me know that I was late again for a great spectacle, which had electrified and energized the whole village to life.

But he dared not; my very presence was making him feel awkward and he calmed down only when I asked him short, material questions, ensuring him that I wasn't the ghost of one of his dead.

My acquaintance was never able to correctly pronounce the name of that villager, surrounded by pious fear in the village. He's always been here, but he lived out of the way and to tell the truth, nobody knew him well, even though every child would be able to point the way to him.

The mysterious villager lived close by and he knew that I would come. His looks were rather inconspicuous, but he himself was neat and kind. He never used many words, and his movements were equally spare, although unconstrained.

He had nothing costly, not even views nor predilections; neither have I once seen a woman by his side. Hence it was impossible to buy him – he had to be asked, and that's why he was surrounded by such unearthly calm. I don't understand why he wasn't called for to attend the dying.

He was waiting for me. I wanted to see his trophy – the skin of this reptile slain by the word. So he led me to his shack. The skin was hanging from the high ceiling of the place, which now appeared to me as huge as a barn, lightened up here and there by the rays of the sun.

He knew what I needed. He himself didn't need hope, but he knew its price. He touched the expertly tawed skin with his hand and said, *"This wasn't the biggest one."* *"I know, Lord,"* I wanted to reply. But his glance stopped me and I only said, *"Yes, I know, this one means nothing. But it's good that you're here."*

November 13th, 1999



*They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them,
“What were you discussing on the way?” But they kept silent,
for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest.
Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, “If anyone wants to be first,
he shall be last of all and servant of all. Taking a child, He set him before them,
and taking him in His arms, He said to them,
Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me;
and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me.”
John said to Him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name,
and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us.” But Jesus said,
“Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name,
and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is for us.
For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name
as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.
Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble,
it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck,
he had been cast into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off;
it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell,
into the unquenchable fire, where their worm does not die,
and the fire is not quenched. If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off;
it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell,
where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.
If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out;
it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye,
than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where their worm does not die,
and the fire is not quenched. For everyone will be salted with fire.
Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again?
Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”*

GREAT-LITTLE MAN

The disciples weren't succeeding in satisfying their Master. His alert gaze was still a puzzle to them – they only knew that this man was looking and listening slightly differently than they did and that He knew more about them than they would be willing to admit. Jesus had to assist them – being little vexed by that¹ – by casting the demon out of the epileptic against whose bonds they tried their strength in vain.

Soon after, there was a silence when in Capernaum the Teacher asked them what they had been talking about on their way home. Mark knew the reason of that silence², like Paul knew the reason why the disciples – as everyone who doesn't know God – were ashamed of their own incompetence, foolishness and powerlessness towards the people to whom they were carrying the message about the Kingdom of God³.

The presence of the Master imperceptibly cumbered their carnal whims – but the disciples weren't yet aware of the fact that it was the closeness of the Father's emissary encompassing them that was giving them the courage to ask questions which would be dismissed by the people of this world with indignation or mockery.

*Which of them was the greatest? Was it the one who cast out the most demons, said the most wise words, healed the most sick, gave the greatest alms, discovered secrets hidden from others, deprived himself of everything he had owned – or maybe the one who was the first to say, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"?*⁴

Today Christ's church grows silent when it hears those bare questions of the little ones taking their first tentative steps on the mountain paths. As if the Father's word wasn't intended for children, and food and drink – for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. As if lofty stone temples locked up the gifts of grace for the households that are pleasing to God in confessionals, behind pulpits and in money boxes for those who

¹ Mark 9:14-27

² Mark 9:30-34

³ Mark 9:28; 2 Corinthians 4:1-4

⁴ Matthew 16:16

don't ask troublesome questions and like indulgences for the bleeding unlike the bleeding of the Son of God.

We don't know whether the apostles were fathers back then, but they must have been children once – such as the one that was presented to them by the hands that were dear to them, and subsequently hugged in front of their eyes with the following words:

*“Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me;
and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me.”*¹

John's doubt arose immediately. He understood perfectly well that the experience shared lately by all the disciples didn't match Jesus' will and words. That their passionate concern for the good fame of the name that was dear to them didn't entirely accommodate the wishes of the Master, who by no means sought his own glory by endowing the disciples with the power to heal and cast out evil spirits.

If John could stand beside the Pharisees, who recently accused the Messiah of dealings with Beelzebub² at the sight of the healing of a demon-possessed man, he would easily notice that he had been driven by motives similar to the Pharisaic ones when, along with his buddies, he had been indignant about the exorcist who hadn't felt like hanging out with them. Still, much time had to elapse before the eagle-eye of the Apostle unhesitatingly judged Diotrophes, whose *political ambitions* weren't to the liking of his merciful Lord³.

The envious glances and sinful intentions of the disciples were bridled by the short and strong cord of the Patron of great hunters of souls. It was, however, only after his death that John began to understand where the greatness of the royal concession⁴ for the prisoners of others' convictions lies. It was when the Holy Spirit ensured him that John himself had benefitted from it very much. For the grace of the Almighty had been and was something that was to serve not as much his pockets, full of holes, as his empty head and stony heart⁵.

¹ Mark 9:37; John 14:16-31

² Mark 3:22

³ 3 John 9-11

⁴ 1 John 4:10

⁵ John 16:8-15

The division among the *dirty dozen* subsided with the gratuitous acquisition of the understanding of the Lord's will¹ and the eager acquiescence with the commandments, the weight and importance of which was revealed to the disciples by the Spirit of the Father's promise. He did so in order that they might be firmly convinced that the kindliness and impeccable manners of the King of kings were costly and non-returnable gifts for the mud-smeared *rascals* who unanimously took flight at the sight of the prospective disgrace and torment of the Son of Man.

The apostles weren't quick to start liking children. Soon after the sermon in Capernaum, when they set off on their way, Jesus was appalled at the obvious deafness of his charges to the orders of the Father He had just issued², granting children special rights – not in the least in view of their (otherwise dubious) *innocence*, but in view of their hard-to-question dependence from arms bigger and much more gracious than their own.

For a long time after the Pentecost, it was still mind-boggling to Peter that his Lord is generous and gracious even to the *heathen savages*³. Only Paul's admonition in Antioch brought up short the hot-blooded servant who hadn't been all that eager to honestly take upon himself the light burden of the apostolic faith⁴.

The Son of his Father was received, and his voice on earth was heard in heaven⁵, but this mighty and wonderful newcomer didn't ask for what belonged to Him⁶, and didn't receive glory from men, in order to amaze and shake those who pray only that a hair of their head wouldn't perish and that nobody would cunningly steal what they call their own.

They receive a reward⁷, but on their way they will be short of a cup of water⁸ given by the hands of those who are only captured and drawn by a living testimony of affiliation with the Righteous One⁹. And it is only the latter ones who won't lose their reward from his holy hands. For by entertaining at home the Lord's trash they will testify that God is truthful¹⁰, for He gave great power to little people and by their modest example of faithfulness He drew to heaven those looking for a non-insignificant hope.

¹ Revelation 3:15-21

² Mark 10:13-16; John 5:30-32

³ Acts 10:24-35

⁴ Galatians 2:11-16

⁵ John 12:28-30

⁶ John 17:8-10

⁷ Matthew 6:2-8

⁸ Matthew 10:40-42

⁹ Mark 9:41

¹⁰ John 3:31-36

When Paul was fighting for the faith of the Galatians, seduced by the hypocrisy of liars, he set before their eyes the picture of a newcomer incapacitated by bodily infirmity¹, whom they once received as an angel of God only because that man had seemingly nothing that would have deserved recognition and applause. Neither speech, nor money, nor looks, nor health.

But this man was beautiful – his inner glow spread onto everyone who would come close, and the peace that he was introducing as well as the wealth that he was lavishing were in their eyes worthy of honor for a royal herald.

The Galatians' happy days ended with their surrender to the yoke of mendacious windbags – those all-powerful and dissolute haughty high-brows who exchanged the promise of freedom for a purchase-sale transaction, slowing down the pace of the march to the holy mountain and depraving the living God of glory.

The yoke burdened the flock, but it was too engrossed in its private martyrdom to be willing to see itself through the eyes of the holy one who bestowed them with gifts, having first cut their bonds with the Lord's sword. Harnessed by an alien yoke, the Galatians were now looking at Paul as at an executioner or an unmerciful ruler² who requires too much of them and whom they owe a *compensation for the breach of the work contract*.

Paul deplored their entanglement in satanic frauds of people with warped minds. And the only thing that he could do with conviction was to tell them:

"Look at me, I am the same as before.

*You would like to pluck out your eyes and give them to me³,
so that I would look at you through your eyes.*

*You want to sacrifice to me a guilt offering,
because you're feeling guilty
towards me, that you have let me down.*

*But it's not me who's accusing you, beloved, but the murderous
law, in which you placed your hopes back again⁴*

¹ Galatians 4:13-14

² Galatians 4:12

³ Matthew 5:29-37

⁴ Galatians 4:8-11

at the instigation of the butchers who incite you,
who are offended by their own arms, legs, mouths, eyes
and God only knows what else.
They would like to keep all the commandments,
but they don't keep even the ones they are telling you about¹.
They fulminate at the wicked, but mention me to them
and you will see how their own wickedness overflows within them.
They curse crooks, thieves, trouble-makers,
but they themselves are among the worst ones,
for they don't know what they're talking about
and what they're snatching by invoking Christ.
They look out for adulteresses and apostates
from the orthodox teaching, because only sinners and heretics
sanction the existence of these mad dogs
preying on human destitution.
In heaven they would be bored to death,
because there they would miss the subjects of their grasping care².
You would see the power of their mercy if I stood before them.
I am an offence and a disturbance to you,
because I haven't changed – you have changed
and would like to give me your own eyes
as to a doll who had them plucked out,
so that I would justify you, like you justify yourselves.
You prefer an executioner to a brother,
because you're flattered by the status of sacrificial
animals, but that'll be the day
of me accepting this alien-appointed role in your ordinance.
I am who I am – nobody else!
And I've got my own eyes. It's not me who suffers from blindness,
but you who suffer from the proclivity to strong drinks
that you are given.
How much do you think the Father will pay you
for these sacrifices torn from the body?! Zilch.
The Father pays only for faithfulness to the Son, and you,

¹ Galatians 6:12-13

² Galatians 4:17

*instead of indebting yourselves in the Son's righteousness,
are eagerly paying it back to Him, fearing your own shadow.
About face! Or forget about me quickly,
because otherwise your heads will get messed up, beloved!"*

That's how the powerful Lord's thought could look also today in the mouth of the least ones¹ who violently seized the heavens², because one day they were gripped by a holy terror and in one moment they grasped that there was no rescue for them, because everything in them was crooked, clumsy, vulgar and stupid apart from the hope that soon they would get new bodies, in which there wouldn't be anything for them to be ashamed of and nothing that they would wish to hide. For the Lord would put an end to the designs of haughty mockers and scoffers stuffing their wallets with the virtue of the Prince of Peace.

He would come and steal away all those who were going to heaven on foot³ and who were not offended by any part of the body. For God took them in – not because they were temperate, prudent, magnanimous, not because they were glowing with health and had a sparkling sense of humor, didn't muscle in to jump the line, offered their seats to the elderly, didn't use dirty words nor condoms, didn't spit into the river from the bridge, didn't inflate frogs and didn't throw bread with carbide to the clamorous seagulls, didn't play at dumping grounds, didn't try to blow up a train, respected their parents and behaved properly at funerals and weddings.

This isn't the reason why God took them in: He did that because He loves *trash*, and besides He's in the habit of making something out of nothing; because He prepared praise for himself not from the mouths of the *nursing* and self-sacrificing, but from the suckling and shameless grace parasites – those children⁴, which He keeps as the apple of his eye⁵.

Those who don't like the Lord's commandments have the fire of their own interestedness awaiting them. For devilish perversity will go out to meet them with open arms and a thousand pieces of salutary advice which will ensure them that some elegant and convincing justification for

¹ Matthew 25:37-40

² Matthew 11:11-12; Luke 3:12-14;
Acts 2:36-37; 16:26-31; 22:6-10

³ Ecclesiastes 10:5-7

⁴ Psalms 8:3; Matthew 21:14-16

⁵ Zechariah 2:11-14

the leg kicking in a good cause, for the hand taking away from the rich in order to give to the poor, for the teary and disappointed eyes that lost the hope of pure profit or revenge on enemies, will surely be found in their immaculate minds.

For love – so they think – justifies everything: violence, lawlessness, greed, licentiousness, foolishness, hatred, and even pride. Pride, whimpering in debasement, whose only glory is the admission of guilt, so that God wouldn't dare to touch her unholy coils and would be forced to appreciate her passionate confession of faith in satanic tricks.

Nowadays, God is a commodity: cheap, comfortable, portable and admirably useful. He comes in handy when travelling, in accounting, in running a church, in healing, in evangelism, in cleaning big cities from scum and outcasts, in setting free from repulsive addictions and in mitigating family squabbles, in commercial transactions and in the cooperation of ecumenical grace syndicates – in a word, He is at call, for every hour of day and night. And only when a faithful one is surrounded by a cloud of God's glory and a pillar of fire that is consuming him, the crowd of fat tubbies freezes in dread¹, for faith is an atrocity crying out to heaven for vengeance.

But Jesus Christ came in the flesh in order for his beloved to be able to refuse the world and defy the tumult of rabble-rousers, hateful to the Father, to whom his Son became a trump card held in the hands greedy for glory.

“God has become indispensable! How could He not be in the Church, which confesses and venerates Him as Lord? God is mandatory, He just has to be and that's it – He promised that himself, after all. Certainly He can't not keep his word. Checkmate. End of game – God belongs to us.”

Indeed – He did promise, but He didn't command to *hold Him to his word*, but to listen to Him attentively – more attentively than to brothers, sisters, wives, parents, more attentively than to those grasping shivers of the human soul, which likes to do the work of the Almighty and take the tips for serving hearty meals sprinkled amply with the wine of God's wrath².

¹ Isaiah 28:16-20

² Daniel 1:3-8

That's why the prophetic wish will come true – God will have a wayfarer's lodging place in the desert¹ so that He will be able to walk away from his people, abandon them so that they would be left alone with their altars, censers, idols, with a thousand confused thoughts chasing one another, with the blades of cheap mercy pointed against the nearest and dearest ones, with millstones around their necks pulling them into the depth flooding their mouths and eyes².

It will come true, because the prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much³ to the confusion of those who offend the little ones with the disgrace of their self-absorbed suffering which wants to know, discover and do everything, but it doesn't want to know and see the Holy One, preferring the alien yoke of unjust judges and hellish liars.

The Church forgot about the power of the veto for the Uncreated One. She subdued the waters and the depths of human passions, built temples and walled herself in with façades of theological formulas and observances, protected herself against accusations of sectarianism, against persecutions and scoffing – she is beautiful, lofty and ... empty. And when a man's weeping is heard in her, the faithful stop their ears, turn away their eyes, put their hands into their pockets, and their legs do an *about turn* by themselves, for they don't want to remember that what is behind the sorrow of the Lord's servant is the sorrow and anger of the Father at the unfaithfulness of the flock⁴.

The Church, however, didn't manage to protect herself against the truth, hidden like a sword in the mouth of the Wise Man, coming in the dark, who scales the city of the mighty and brings down the stronghold in which they trust⁵. But among the meanest and least valiant ones there will be those who won't be offended by their own eye and who won't desire to endow the Anguished One with it. Instead, they will look at themselves through the eyes of the Wise Man from Nazareth and whisper briefly, but succinctly: *"God, have mercy on me, a sinner."*

Rushing streams of living water will flow from within those who won't – not for all the world – be willing to resemble the unrestrained Greek strongman, the son of an Olympic god and an earthly woman. When

¹ Jeremiah 9:1-14

² Luke 17:1-4

³ James 5:16-18

⁴ Deuteronomy 20:10-20; Mark 3:5;
Luke 13:34-35

⁵ Proverbs 21:22-31

he was told to clean the sleazy stable of king Augias, this clever hero directed the waters of a nearby river into it. He did that because he had to – the wrath of small gods for crimes that he himself perpetrated remained on him.

The Mighty One of Israel didn't have to do anything, and the wrath of the living God remained on the Messiah not because He sinned, but because He himself became sin for those whom the Father had given to Him.

This Man wasn't a hero, but the Holy One – He knew that and that's why He didn't order anyone on earth to labor beyond human strength. He did the work for us like a master carpenter and pointed to Jacob's ladder¹, which every decent peasant is able to use for climbing to heaven – if he believes that the Lord's commandments are like vitally practical steps of a rescue ladder enabling one to escape fire and destruction.

The mouths of these runaway criminals will issue a melodious thanks for the inexpressible gift of grace. This gift will be a big surprise and an unpleasant shock to the unfaithful scamps who want to enter heaven legally, with a pouch of merits for posterity, a smooth countenance and accompanied by an entourage of admirers.

To them, the meeting with the Judge of Israel won't even be a dream anymore – at the sound of the trumpets they will flee to the holes in the ground², where they will be consumed like a heap of chaff by the fire of rebellion which they kindled themselves with the flame of humility studied in front of the mirror. They will soon throw away the checks and receipts for the deeds of their faith, having clutched them in their hands until the last moment, when God reminds them for how much they appraised the Righteous One, since they measured the greatness of his grace with their own greatness³, expecting much more for royal gifts than Jesus of Nazareth provided for the disciples.

For to the great pilgrims, heralds of truly good tidings, a cup of water was to be enough, coming from the hands that reach out by themselves to the pilgrims' mouths and eyes thirsty for the sight of the Promised land, because along with their presence the blind saw the light and shackles fell off the prisoners' feet.

¹ John 1:51; Genesis 28:11-17

² Hosea 10:5-8; Luke 23:27-31

³ 1 Corinthians 2:10-15

These will receive a reward for not spitting in the faces of those who – each one of them – were telling them, looking straight into their eyes: *“He lives. He sent me to you to tell you that. I know Him, He promised that He would come soon. Believe the gospel. Watch and pray, don’t sleep and keep peace in the boundaries given to you.”*

John had to often recall that gentle and patient admonition, which later allowed him to understand that true, perfect greatness makes great those it cares for, because it restores with invisible power the measure of their fragile existence, from which it itself draws thanks to a secret bond with the King of spirits hidden in light unapproachable.

It is difficult to point out a man who would remind the faithful more often than him of what love to God consists in and what it serves¹. This eldest apostle had the Lord’s commandments in his guts. He didn’t talk about them too much and didn’t frantically search for them thinking about the maturity exam². He went by without unnecessary words, for the Word inhabited him by faith³ and someone who loves spares his neighbors from bouncing cheques.

For a prophet isn’t the one who *speaks* about God, but the one who sees Him and does what He does. And everyone who sees him knows that grace is something very costly, since he himself says “no” so often. For God can refuse even a faithful apostle⁴, let alone those who don’t want to know Him, distorting the simple thought of the Lord and exhibiting whimsical indignation at God’s decrees that have already been passed – as if they weren’t waiting for Him, but for a next pay rise (bought with a hunger strike) from the ruler of this world for the murderous but impassioned toil of putting obstacles on a level road and catching homing pigeons with news from the frontlines.

In this world, many things can be *handled*, but the only One who breathes hope is the Spirit of God, because He doesn’t lavish according to merit, but as He pleases⁵. And there is only one thing on earth that is pleasing to God.

It is so pleasing to Him that He stoops down and lifts every scrap⁶, every part of his creation, which lacks all that He has in abundance. And

¹ 1 John 4:10; John 5:3

² 1 John 5:10-12

³ John 14:23-24

⁴ 2 Corinthians 12:7-11

⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

⁶ John 6:12-58

He tells everyone around: *"This is mine! This belongs to Me and to Me only, for I am Lord."*

February 2nd, 2000



Exposition

The speech about stumbling blocks¹ is one of the most categorical verdicts of the Judge of the living and the dead. For the severity of the images used in it was to effectively compete with the age-old clips of rape and violence for the possession of which people willingly give their time and money.

Not much evil comes from indulging the passions that follow reports of bloodbaths and rapes on teenagers with greedy eyes, summing up the images of other people's anguish that are far from their guts with expressions of holy indignation. Not much evil, but also nothing good. The steam gets away through the whistle and the wheels don't move an inch. For even the most horrible image of the mutilation of the body isn't able to call the soul to show a little forbearance for its neighbors who are worthy of it, not to speak of that wide, royal outpouring of angelic goodness, decency and loveliness that is sometimes manifested in the lives of saints longing for the Savior.

God is a giver – silent, powerful and indefatigable, and his every gift in the hands of a faithful one reveals to others his fervor and lavishness. God is not a moralizer, which means that his wishes don't have a lot in common with the expectations of all those who wish – like John at that point² – for their neighbors to match their zeal, honesty, erudition, apprehension – to be at least (!) like them.

God doesn't excuse himself, nor does He tarry; He always reaches out, for He wants to make contact with the human – not because the human met some of his requirements, but exactly because he met none.

¹ Matthew 5:20-48

² Mark 9:38

It hasn't yet occurred to the disciples, accustomed to idolatry, that they could demonstrate their dependence from the Father in heaven in a simpler¹ and more effective way than demanding others' submission based exclusively on the external attributes of the power given to them. It was exactly the obtaining of the reliability of the witnesses of his anguish, desired by Jesus, that the warning against setting traps and obstacles in the way of the least ones was to serve.

The disciples must have been unaware of the fact that they themselves were among the *latter*, whom the Father's grace was to serve and whose entrance to the Kingdom He facilitated, having abolished the law of commandments². They wanted the Messiah to belong only to them and their own greatness to be measured with the measure they lusted after, and not with the one they were to love.

John's testimony of truth gave the lie to his own soul – even in the masterful picture of the conversation of the Teacher with the blind men He had healed³. Had that old man, while writing his account, granted himself the rights that he greedily invoked along with the disciples near Capernaum, he wouldn't have allowed for the law of grace to make itself heard – the law that points at its benefactor by trust. Even Jesus didn't become indignant at the man lavishly endowed with sight, who told Him:

*"Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?"*⁴

"Who is this Son of Man you are talking about?"

The apostles were to be answering this question to the little ones with their own lives until the end of their days. For it is the right of children to know the Father and ask Him for what befits the future coheirs, adopted by Him as sons, and not to wheedle from Him advance payments on the account of their own glory, like the elder brother who was hurting the Father's eyes by having spared Him the expense for an armor of faith bereft of itself⁵, put on by the younger⁶ upon the secret commission of the Almighty⁷.

¹ John 16:24

² Ephesians 2:14-17

³ John 9:35-41

⁴ John 9:36

⁵ Luke 15:29-30

⁶ Luke 15:12-21

⁷ John 10:17-18

The lust for power and recognition, however, had to be judged by the Spirit of truth, and not by the spirit of falsehood, who moralizes, banishing and sentencing to oblivion every imperfect and impure impulse of human will, leaving behind a cold breath of sententious, empty and haughty teaching, repulsive to the least ones, the only content of which is the debasement of the human condition dressed in a penitential robe of incorporeal delusion¹.

The purport of these blasphemies was later being exposed and stigmatized by all the apostles, who were then already perfectly aware that in order to grow wise, one has to become foolish², and in order to be exalted one has to descend to the earth and have a closer look at the Son of Man. For it was by no means by accident that the impurities of his charges were manifested in the presence of the Pure One – it was a rule saving to all the little beings found, set free and purified by Him. Thanks to Him and his power those beings lost interest in condemning their neighbors for having feet running to evil, hands reaching for someone else's property and eyes greedily looking for the iniquities of the neighbors, not justifying, however, the foul deeds committed with their own hands³.

Today, the reports on the iniquity of the world replace justice, and the gospel has become unverified and dubious hearsay, almost a piece of marketplace gossip in the mouths that don't remember that love covers and heals instead of stripping and whipping the children who know well even without that *ministry* that they are far from God's righteousness, and therefore – that they can't afford tickets to paradise stamped by grace vending machines.

They can, however, afford to send away uninvited guests from the fronts of their houses – those whose hand is too heavy for Christ's ministry, who are unsteady on their legs and whose eyes, instead of a cup of water to which the heralds of good tidings are entitled, look for a drinking glass. For the talk about the God whose not-so-swift coming they are heralding apparently proceeds much better in a nice and relaxed or funereal and solemn (*anointed*) atmosphere.

To some of them, it will be better to drop the not altogether royal hypothesis concerning the illness of Paul's eyes. Maybe then, thanks

¹ Matthew 25:41-45

² 1 Corinthians 3:18-20

³ Isaiah 5:18-23

to the Lord's spittle and salves, they will see the light¹ themselves, instead of dragging into their shameless hypocrisy those who rightly doubt whether the Apostle could have buttered up his beloved and gullible Galatians for the sacrifice of their best intentions offered to him previously².

That's not like him, just like it never was and isn't like the Righteous One to brainwash the people who are ultimately stupefied with fear at the thought that their eyes don't see what they should be seeing and their legs and arms don't do what they should be doing according to their prompters, infuriated with venom.

Legs are for walking, arms are for taking and giving and eyes are for looking. Only that the head isn't for thinking about the tip of one's own nose, but about how to escape destruction and, to that, earn handsomely³ for the salutary – but not binding others – testimony of faith supported by the Father's Spirit.

Nowadays, disinclination is a sin. A Christian can't just say, *"I don't want to. I don't feel like it. No, thank you."* He can't refuse, because the ground will slip from under his feet. And what is he standing on? On Christ. And if the Lord doesn't like something?... Can God not feel like putting his seal to church skeletons, theological tracts, revival programs, empty declarations and platitudes about love encompassing the cattle that is repugnant to the eyes?

Can He not feel like doing something that doesn't serve Him? He can. And can the eyes that see treacheries, hypocrisy, venality and idle talk bother their owner – can, let's say, a prophet be bothered by his own eyes, can they become a snare and a trap in his way?

The Lord deemed that they can – that's why He also said that it is better to pluck them out than to go to hell for persuading others that they are not loved because they call things by their names, like simple questions and simple answers and dislike lengthy or too lofty sermons and costly pacts and familiarities credited by *musclemen and loudmouths of grace*.

It is better to pluck out such an eye, because it's attached to the head, which is harmed by the overload of sensations, and along with it by the abundance of God's mercy over the passing world that is troubling to

¹ Revelation 3:17-18

² Galatians 4:15-16

³ Luke 14:12-14; 16:1-9; 18:22

its guilty conscience. And unbelief is, after all, a much greater sin against God than a simple surgical procedure performed on the body that will return to dust anyway.

Therefore, those who determine the limits of other people's actions should, first of all, ascertain the limits that God determined for themselves and whether they didn't inadvertently *help Him* in making far-reaching decisions bought with not altogether innocent blood. For a request becomes a salutary order only in the mouths of men and women holding in their hands the Lord's sword, and not a carrot and a stick – and to whom not everything that is human is alien.

WISDOM AND REVELATION

I had been living in the harbor hotel for long enough to get used to the everyday pictures. From among the more conspicuous ones, what struck you most was the one that gave the not altogether courtly name to the quarters for workers from outside the city.

Even to my colleagues' inattentive guests it wasn't difficult to realize that the term *Stallion Lodge*, even if a little obscene, at least didn't suffer the burden of that infertile linguistic licentiousness of moralizers¹ to whom the mere sight of a tipsy portress or the bulging briefcase of a customs officer walking down the gangway of a ship cries out to heaven for vengeance in many not too wisely chosen words.

Visits ended at ten p.m., but at least one of the janitresses only lowered her official tone to a confidential groan at that time, merely fearful for her own job position, before she turned a blind eye to the next *smuggle of goods*.

The *goods* weren't too expensive – hardly anyone there could afford professional prostitutes who used to stand around the harbor bars and restaurants – the women brought in by the dockworkers usually lacked the gall of the *courtesans*, who valued their bodies higher, even though they weren't always more generously endowed with charm.

They probably had in their mouths only the taste of an inexpensive vermouth, sparkling champagne or vodka with pepsi cola, and in their misty eyes a small hope for respite after a day that they preferred to forget. Only bigotry could judge their uncertain, confused smile as lascivious – there was in it merely a shadow of that undressed and harmless taunt that is due to all the people on this earth to whom frivolity and shamelessness don't have their counterparts in heaven.

They were giving themselves for free, being well aware of that, even if they were forgetting that a pieceworker looks different in the evening than in the morning. Some of them would fall from importance, becoming an easy target of men's scoffing and brutality. But those who grew de-

¹ Romans 2:11-29

based in their own eyes and would wander from one room to another for weeks were rarely begrudged bashful impulses of pity, shoving a piece of bread in front of their nose¹.

Only the most abhorrent types – and there was neither less nor more of them than anywhere else – were deeply hurt even by the most modest thought of responsibility for those *trollops* tainted with their own judgment, as if the weaknesses of women were to themselves only an age-old justification² allowing their passionate falsehood for fat, stout judgments over the injustice and corruption of people, greater than them, belonging to the authorities that they hated with abundance.

The three young men inhabiting the room opposite the lavatory had indeed something of this perky, well-simulated arrogance that I didn't find in my disheveled and often too effusive colleagues from work, insistently inviting me for a shot.

They were conscientious and well-organized. They drank quite systematically as well, but without a great effort they managed to reconcile drinking bouts with work. Afterwards I met a lot of people who were more ostentatious and had much loftier (in their own opinion) reasons in showing off the orderliness of their lives and dignity that was problematic only to a few eyes. Still, even from among those who borrowed money from me I preferred those who didn't try – like the latter – to make the impression that theirs was a hanging matter.

I recognized in the woman who once walked in on me having a shower the fiancée of one of them. A men's hotel didn't provide any surplus of luxury. Only a few of the toilet cubicles had doors that could be somehow closed – not to mention that both the showers on that floor were separated from the part containing the washbasins only from one side.

Nobody complained – the sight of male nakedness aroused neither suspicions of exhibitionism (hardly anyone knew the meaning of that word), nor any holy passions, always rather brandishing shamelessness than dissolution. So I was merely surprised that the woman approached me.

Admittedly, she was tipsy, but not drunk enough for me to part with my reasonable presumption that she didn't take a wrong turn. Neither

¹ Ezekiel 16:49-50

² Ezekiel 16:51-52

did a slight timidity stop her hand, with which she touched my arm, as if words – “*can I, should I, is it befitting*” – lost all meaning to her at the sight of a body of a stranger not too embarrassed by her presence.

It looked like she simply wanted to cuddle. At any rate, my gentle persuasion aiming at making her realize that she would assuredly make her dress wet didn’t have any effect and despite my too-tactful efforts she managed to embrace me halfway with one hand, stepping right under the stream of water. Only then, not wishing for any complications, I led her out of the shower cabin – just in time, as it turned out.

To this day I’m not certain whether the shower wasn’t to her a greater encouragement to such extravagance than my body. While eagerly confirming the inappropriateness of her behavior in the face of the witness, her fiancée, a little shaken, but thankful for my sobriety and reason, who popped into the lavatory a moment later in search of his darling, not too sober on his account. But a man in my situation can’t have a clear conscience, even if in such a moment he didn’t think of a more private corner, where things that the wise and prudent haven’t dreamed of are possible.

I, of course, did. Afterwards I often thought of such a place where sentences are always passed in favor of the culprits, if they get there somehow, where there is no limit whatsoever between a deed and a word, for each judgment flows as if from the wellspring of all identity and its knowledge, where there is no hidden terror, crack or crevice, no inner emptiness and deadness doomed to itself, washed down with cheap wine in the fear of rejection which becomes a fact like a barge without a helmsman, damaged by the reefs.

“A man shouldn’t be surprised like this, so mercilessly left to appearances,” I thought. So many times I didn’t know how to behave, frantically searching for some pattern, some foothold. I was so often ashamed because of an ill-concealed bluff or brag that I was ready to think that my actual nakedness would be better in the eyes of my small judge than the glimpses of badly tailored attire, not tailor-made for me and ragged, testifying of my schemes and sidesteps. I didn’t have as much strength as others. I wasn’t succeeding at any virtuosity or mastery that I overtly or secretly admired, asking myself only one question that is so rarely being asked:

"Who is that master? Does he know me?"

The answers were coming quicker and quicker as I was growing into maturity, still waiting for the voice that would confirm my vague presentiment that the power of my stranger makes a big impression on few. I was trying to be at least noble, following others in thinking that nobleness is characterized precisely by the readiness to defend laudable convictions, and against the sense that with such an indefinite attitude I was taking part in some unheard-of perversity bearing in my own life only the fruit of an increasingly monstrous fear of humiliation and downfall. Reason was to me the most obvious contradiction to nobility, for the only measure of it available to me was the interestedness and immodesty of the market of pervasive services for the people.

When, in moments of dread, I tried to put my own thoughts in order, it was with difficulty that I obtained only a vague awareness of naked (which meant *obscene*, shameful to me) facts:

"I defend others – a different name can't be given to it when someone seeks in the beings most disfigured by lusts for signs of a mute, latent humanity. It costs too much. Who is paying for it? Who is paying me for that – for those acts of will, meaning nothing to others, which I consider my holy obligation? What holiness is it – it is some kind of madness leeching off of the remnants of my strength! I notice and appreciate the good sides of everything because I'm afraid that somebody will see me in a worse light than I see myself in.

Can someone whose gaze I'm afraid of be smaller than me, if people leave as if without burdens even from my doorstep? Is it a legitimate fear? It is, if anyone of those who walked the earth would be my judge. I have no defense against those whose deeds and words I examined – they are small, but there's many of them, very many. They aren't stronger, they're weaker, but they don't know that. And if they don't know they're weak, can they threaten someone who knows that all too well? What do they not know that I do? I do know something!

What was it that made me depart one day, leaving behind everything I knew: family, university, thoughts of the future, acquaint-

tances? Where is that power? I guess there's something I didn't understand – can one understand something one hasn't done? No – but I've done it, and by myself I would never have invented it – no sane human would have invented it. Am I sane? Because if someone won't tell me why I've done this, there's no hope for me. If there's no God, I'm crazy, because nothing justifies what I have done without any hesitation. Who is God – do I know Him?

Can one meet God and not know it? Doesn't He ever introduce himself, is He less tactful and less courteous than me?! There's so many things that I understand and that I am able to calculate, but I don't know who I am and who has calculated me. Is the whole confusion about me my fault, all these glances of my dear and near ones, full of concern and regret, telling me that I dreamed something up? It's not my fault!

And is it anyone's fault at all, do I have any chance to find this perpetrator of a presumed crime against norms and customs? Did I make some mistake that I regret, would I like to come back? No, I don't feel like it at all. I can't turn back time, but I don't see any important reason why I should be ashamed of what I've done – it is enough that others are ashamed of me.

I simply look and see, and a strange voice speaks to me sometimes, and I don't know whose voice it is, what it is saying and whether it is a voice at all. Should I wish the ground to swallow me up only because of that? I don't know. But I'm not Socrates. I do know something! I can't say that I know that I know nothing. I don't know that! Exactly that. I don't want to know much, I'm not a wise man and I don't want to be one – it's too bothersome and I can't afford that with my empty wallet. I'm a fool – whom am I to ask? That woman at the clinic, the priest, my wife, the doctors?

I'm not sick, it's just that sometimes some plague is choking me – it's them who are sick with their genial gibberish, which falls apart like toys when you take a closer look at it, with those idiotic, anxious questions of the ward head who has a liquor cabinet in his office («How are you feeling today? Is there anything ailing you, mister Pawel?»). They know nothing about pity. They think they have something, but they have nothing for me.

I got myself into the ward to see if they would take me for someone insane, knowing that it would be so and it couldn't be otherwise. They employ the concept of a clinical norm and use it as they will, merely taking care that the deviations from the norm would be diagnosed in those who complain or in those about whom others complain much. In my hands and eyes everything is decaying, coming apart, is crooked, broken, split.

But how do I know that? Others surely look like they didn't know that. They alleviate and ease the pain by eliminating sensory organs and cells responsible in their eyes for the chaos of the soul. They're butchers, not doctors! And the patients are victims driven under their knives with platitudes of the civilization of death, rich in half-measures."

Some ten years later I remembered that woman who had left the room for a moment and to whom there were few things that were undoubtedly good and desired. There was no great duplicity in her involuntary shamelessness, like in mute, unwitting motions of people finding the narrow path of faith thanks to God, in spite of humanity's heroic rubbish and idolatrous outbursts.

When my eyes opened, I didn't see much – some uncertain human voice and someone's joy, incomprehensible to me. A few faces that knew better than me that something great and beautiful happened – and very strange. And it happened without the participation of human hands, thoughts and feelings, and even in spite of the will of those who aren't used to waiting for explanations.

I only managed to remember the thing that is most valuable on the road – that wide, full and powerful gesture of permission behind my back, which told me better than any words that I received more than I ever dreamed of.

Today I know that it had to be Him – the One about whom people said so much nonsense, crediting their own useless words to his clear account. I quickly grasped that human wickedness was judged by these very priceless words of Jesus, alien to natural light. It was given to me to reveal their royal momentum and strength of conviction, causing by

that the perplexity of another company of not-too-attentive and not too peacefully disposed admirers of the Messiah.

I later met a man who snorted impatiently, seeing my labor and obstinacy which saw the truth where he himself didn't expect to find it. I became his debtor – exactly like I got into debt with many others – by no means through what he valued in himself nor what others valued in him.

Rather through what he himself had lost and neglected, as if he was afraid that God could be much less particular in matters of utmost importance to him, and in other matters – meaningless to him – He could turn out to be much more inexorable than revenue officers who sometimes hear even the human requests that are not overpaid.

If I were to guess, I don't think that I gained this preference – often troublesome to outsiders – in the Lord's eyes by anything more (but for sure with nothing less) than with this very stifling infirmity, ready, however, to support itself on its hope with the only body free from blemish, like this slightly befuddled woman, more confident of what she wanted than death, managed at last to permanently establish herself in my handy lectionary.

Afterwards, I saw many garments, many futile efforts paid for with heavy cash from the treasuries of earthly valuables and with the lives of the slaves of the beast, lured by small wealth, in order to acquire the rights to trade in the hope of the weary and thirsty¹.

It wasn't without dread that I discovered that the angels really won't have any trouble with binding the human beings that aren't properly dressed in bundles to be burned² – those whose steps to the gates of the holy city are preceded by their deeds³. For these people despise Christ's body and head and hold the royal order for something less than a fruit of begging on the behalf of culprits.

I thought about how little it takes for the image of God in the Church to be just in the reverse from the one revealed by Jesus Christ. It is enough to deftly give it a little more *human* shape – some ornaments, luxuries, a little stress in the *I deserve this* spot, tender to the soul, a touch of impractical sanctities, charming untidiness, studied nonchalance and blessings for all that moves, a bit of subtle irony for the *unenlightened*, devoid

¹ Revelation 13:15-17; 18:1-19

² Matthew 13:37-43

³ Revelation 14:13; Psalms 50:7-23

of imagination and panache – and the labor of the Lord's saints crumbles to dust and enters a bland, sugary odor of a carcass raking up another pool behind the backs of the *inspired*, to the joy of the sharpers playing with marked cards of fate.

For liars and slanderers of the lavish hand of the Almighty are probably only pleased with the clothes for which they can pay for by themselves – by no means with the ones that they could receive by doing what they were commanded to. As if God the Father assessed their own nakedness too rashly and conferred on the Son the role of an unrefined rake and declared under their holy eyes, hands and legs that He should confess his error, doing justice to the defenders of human, and especially womanly rights – resolute, magnanimous and bloated to the limits of decency.

So that these people wouldn't, in any of the nooks of the unoccupied, swept and adorned room, accidentally stumble in the vestibule, stable or at the workshop upon signs and living portents of beauty and power of the regenerate body, devoid of their passions, and called to life thanks to Him.

As if the causes of joy, sadness, fear, powerlessness, agitation and anger of the Lord's Servant – those only real (even though imperceptible to greedy eyes) tokens of nakedness on this earth were to be – from the will of his Principal – veiled by a hail of all-knowing cold stones – those kisses of death to which the resistance to a lie cries out to heaven for vengeance in veiled mockery and ridicule of grace aggregates powered by oil straight from the abyss.

I have never wondered how it would end – I knew that all too well, much better than those who threaten others with hell and eternal damnation. What I didn't know was whether the Father would be even a little proud of me if I didn't tell about what I saw and heard in a tone that rarely appears on earth and that is impossible to imitate and manifold in thousands of soulless copies, as far from the truth as a map from travel, a copy from the original, a tool from the hand and death from life.

This tone is like the sound of a tuning fork, rarely thought of by the performers, and even more rarely by the listeners – even though without this clever fork it would be futile to seek applause – both in heaven and on

earth. This instrument has one asset: it is precise, and its sound is clear, always the same, faithful to the matter and the craftsman.

Some can recall this one note without this instrument. They are said to possess absolute pitch – it’s an overkill, but nobody today is bothered by an *absolute*, unless the voice resounds with a note that had been long forgotten by everyone – even with that strange question of the Wise Man from Nazareth, finishing one of the parables with the following words:

*“However, when the Son of Man comes,
will He find faith on the earth?”¹*

Because only faith can’t be counterfeited and smothered, nor is it possible to diminish the honor and dignity of those who are pointing at it, knowing one thing: that in order to live and keep that life, one has to have really good connections and know the right Person – the One who, while He was on earth, somehow avoided empty words and promises.

There are quite a few bands, but the Almighty knows well² only one of them – the one by the sound of which people sober up – not necessarily because rain is falling on their heads.

May 1st, 2000

¹ Luke 18:1-8

² 2 Timothy 2:19

For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, "Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, "Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours." But his master answered and said to him, "You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 25:14-30

THE TWO WHO STOLE THE MOON

The servant was somewhat relieved on hearing of his Master's departure. He liked it when prophecies came true, even the slightly ominous ones¹, so he gladly sojourned among unintrusive followers like himself, who didn't curse unfruitful trees, and whom the sight of a giant mountain on the path filled with delight and elation².

The respect for human achievements didn't interfere, in his view, with the fear that he experienced when listening to the words of the Son of God. This man was to him, after all, a living embodiment of his hidden longings and the desire to one day leave everything and walk away like a king – like somebody who doesn't need to ask for anything anymore, knowing that what was supposed to be finished in him, had been finished. The received talent³ was to him virtually excess, and only out of innate shyness he didn't attempt to refuse it, knowing well that one doesn't say no to an overlord without a clear reason.

His callous eyes had long been seduced by the picture of sweet bondage of self-abasement and service, with which he intended to redeem the terrible faults of his neighbors, and which – in the right time and place – would allow him to testify with dignity that Jesus is Lord, period. At last he was sure of something and he had no intention of following into the footsteps of his two companions, who didn't match him in modesty and restraint in receiving gifts from the Master's hand.

He knew well who Jesus was. He could easily demonstrate the shallowness of the pagan frauds, which, in their own estimation, saw in the Master from Nazareth a wise man worthy of respect, thus giving Him a place among the merited for the salvation of the world. He had even already written a lengthy treatise for the ignoramuses, whose knees were to bend at the sole sight of the footnotes and the list of source literature – if only the opponents of his Master, when bending over the Bible, would be at least half as reliable and honest as himself.

¹ Matthew 16:21

² Matthew 21:18-22

³ Unit of measurement and money
equaling to 60 mines, around 26 kg.

His thankfulness toward the coworkers, who supported him considerably in the noble and exalted mission and his tenderness towards the needy, moved and embarrassed the most hardened hearts, which would never have thought that one can do so much for someone whom one doesn't see and doesn't know.

The servant sometimes transformed into a monster (because people love monsters and pay much to see some fright with the oil of grace pouring down on it) – he would then roar in a great voice over the unbelief of his charges, who fell before him like they had lost power over their legs. He would hyper-piously anathematize the wave of squalor, lechery and debauchery flooding the world, which was allegedly lethal to their sensitive and delicate consciences. As if before accepting the faith they were less threatened than after joining the ranks of the saints, and as if the sight of more and more sparingly clothed bodies was to scare them more than the thought of incorporeal, jeering ghouls controlling every word of the servant's greedy mouth.

The transubstantiations, however, only confirmed the faithful in the deep and otherwise right confidence in the supernatural character of the ministry of their patron and benefactor, who took upon himself their terrible offences before their very eyes, suffering mercilessly and very loudly while doing it. For holy rage constituted, in the opinion of his followers, an appropriate counterweight for thousands of cool, balanced sentences, divided and grouped elegantly into chapters and sections, paragraphs and points, in which it stood in black and white that Satan is wrong, and besides he's an idiot. The words *we should*, *we must* rang in the ears of the faithful as the sound of the shackles at the feet of the torturer and oppressor of the brothers, handcuffed and beaten before them. His fiery breath in their nostrils was the only foretaste of freedom known to them.

Winner takes all – they knew as much, because they had to know it as people united by the hatred towards the defeated, hostile forces, which they allegedly bridled, admiring the picture of the Lord's servant, humanized according to their wish, and brandishing at the enemies of their cross with verses torn out of the Bible like posts removed from a fence surrounding a house. The imperious deportment of this scoundrel seemed to many a better guarantee than the assurances of

the true God, and the obedience to him as well as the respect of acclaimed dignitaries became a blissful seal of his credibility, longed-for by the nations.

Obviously, he wasn't as careless as to purport to be the Messiah – in any case, it wasn't necessary. Everyone found his place beside him just fine anyway, giving him many a chance to heartily assure the witnesses of human gratitude exhibited towards him (because people would kiss the ring of his right-hand finger and make various sacrifices to him) of his deepest abasement and humility.

He was – as a matter of fact – the most ardent champion of the abolition of barriers between people. He personally abolished the most powerful ones, making, even to those who were little interested in it, offers they could not refuse. Healings, signs and wonders belonged to the most significant assets of the master (not counting the courtly entourage that always surrounded him), because they silenced the disbelievers, who weren't fully convinced whether the servant knew the Master and if he was a herald of good news to those who knew Him, and disastrous news to the reprobates.

Consolation wasn't his specialty. More specifically, he simply didn't know how to do it, where to get it, and who might actually need it. For he ingenuously considered the membership in his powerful faction the warranty of God's righteousness, and clean hands and nails the best show-piece of missionary aspirations. He burst out laughing at the jokes that were told him, but when he tried to make the multitudes of the faithful laugh, one didn't really know whether it was befitting to laugh, or rather to cry.

He wasn't made for the role of a jester (more for a role of a rather slow-witted mafioso), even though sometimes he seemed more funny than the court customs provided for, especially in the purpose of pilgrimages proclaimed by the world. These pilgrimages sure looked like the performances of a travelling circus, which is usually a lot more unassuming and more effective in forming in the viewers the conviction that the acrobats, the equestrians, the tamers, the fire-eaters, and even the clowns – know what they're doing.

His heroic and frenzied passion for saving the lost (and he even racked his brain as to how to justify the baptism of embryos in the eyes of the

faithful) would be of course hard to measure out even with a golden talent, but few cared if the costly, but also lucrative splendor of the salvation army had the seal of the right person. Any doubt in this delicate matter would be equal to heresy and devilish plotting (because the devil adores to put the cart before the horse), so the ranks of glory held on tight, shoulder to shoulder, for hardly anyone would fancy the earthly destiny of an apostate devoid of reason, not even worthy of pity.

* * *

But there were also the two who stole the moon¹ – they just took it for themselves. They were indeed obnoxious and hot-headed and nobody liked them, only the Lord God. And that's because of their unparalleled love of the Father's money. And because they couldn't even afford bread – simply being two penniless paupers – it didn't even cross their minds that in a dark, moonlit night one could want anything else than this delicious, luminescent croissant, which sometimes turns into a pancake².

They knew well that the third one didn't like the Lord Jesus, and that's why he buried his talent, so that he wouldn't have to grasp for the heavens³ – so they cursed him cruelly and unanimously⁴, because he drove insane many nations, tribes and tongues, which cherished holy groves, holy cows, holy matters, holy Scripture, holy platitudes, holy tombs and a load of other holy things – but they didn't want to know the Holy One.

Of course this caused a huge ruckus. *"How dare they,"* they said. *"It's outrageous and unfair! Why, the moon is for everybody!"* They wanted to throw them into jail, to toast them alive, to grill them with questions, so that they give it back. They even appealed – O human perversity! – to their consciences, but the two only spread their hands helplessly and said that they felt in no way guilty towards the blind humanity⁵, and they couldn't give it back, even if they wanted to, because they had eaten it and had it within them⁶.

The ones most offended by them and most fierce towards them were the great evangelists and prophets, as well as those who were cautiously

¹ A reference to a well-known Polish story where two rascals steal the moon (translator's note).

² John 6:44-57

³ Luke 16:13-17; John 6:60-66

⁴ Isaiah 65:10-15

⁵ Isaiah 8:18-23

⁶ 1 John 5:10

called apostles. They lost the hope of profit from the official and socially condoned practice of buying and selling indulgences¹ which they had previously done under the moonlight, accompanied by the croaking of frogs². So they flew into holy passion and gathered around all that is holy in order to uproot this wild, however beautiful, offshoot of their orthodox thicket of mutually contradictory convictions³. But they couldn't. Even though they scratched the earth with their claws and approached first from one side and then from the other; though they were sweating, due to the cruel desert heat⁴, and though they read the tea leaves and the stars, nothing came of it⁵.

So they got even more angry⁶ – because somehow the Lord God didn't want to support this vehemence of theirs and He didn't even give them a bulldozer or a shovel – and they pretended that they didn't see or hear anything, not knowing that by their hypocrisy they were really proving the truth and credibility of the judgments of the living God, who had departed from them, abandoning them to the wickedness and iniquity that they committed towards Him, so that they wouldn't repent⁷, and be shattered without help⁸.

And the faithful witnesses passed judgments about them, about what had been, what was and what was to come, so that those who would hear would believe and have peace within themselves, just like they had the moon within them⁹. They would then be filled with great unruffled joy – such vast happiness illuminating their countenances because of God's great mercy over the creation and the hope that their Master would come soon. For these things, which had been predicted by someone who loves sinners and does not deceive them, were coming true before their very eyes.

And there were two of them in order to, according to the law of God, witness against the mafioso servant – and so that he who earned the most, because he had the most, would get even more at the expense of the villain, who really got under his skin and didn't have an ounce of shame, and lied blatantly to his Master that he was afraid of Him, while he not

¹ Revelation 13:11-18

² Revelation 16:12-14

³ Isaiah 60:21

⁴ Revelation 16:8-9

⁵ Leviticus 19:26-31; 20:6; Daniel 5:11-12;

Deuteronomy 18:10-15

⁶ Revelation 16:10-11

⁷ Isaiah 29:7-14; Matthew 13:14-15

⁸ Zephaniah 1:11-18; Zechariah 12:2-9

⁹ Revelation 11:10-13; Isaiah 29:23-24

only wasn't afraid of him, but didn't even have enough reason to try doing what befits every servant: to get to know his Master.

What he wanted, of course, was the power over people's souls, and the talent was really getting in his way, because by trading with it, he wouldn't be able to deceive those who dwell on the earth with such an unprecedented success. They wouldn't believe him so easily when he would say, *to the one who has not, more shall be given, and from the one who has, it shall be taken away*¹. However, this devil's spawn knew that the most important thing for his cause was that the people on the earth would not have the seal of God on their foreheads², because then nothing would save them from the angels of destruction.

For those who had the seal (because they asked that God mark them somehow and separate them from the world, because they were too weak to do this on their own), didn't let the villain tell them that God can be known by making some daredevil decision. They knew that nobody can know Him without his will and that no human resolution means anything in the face of his resolutions and dispositions, the saving understanding of which is granted only by himself through his Spirit of promise given to the ones faithful to Jesus.

This is why this hypocrite and liar became so impudent and intimidated many godly and law-loving people³, so that they wouldn't be so stupid and ridiculous in their own eyes in the attempts to know the truth, as Jesus and the apostles, and the prophets frequently passed judgments about this very thing. And that, instead of duly appreciating that which has been given to them, probably only out of incomprehensible and reprehensible vanity and because of a lack of good manners on the part of the Son of God⁴, they would eagerly make use of the – allegedly saving to their souls – achievements of civilization and seize by themselves for the esoteric knowledge of faith, believing that God values their order and good investments, and pretty formulas, and that if they do some brain work on the Scripture and bow politely to their enemies, He will have to give them the Holy Spirit. Otherwise they would have to take offense at Him for not completing their magnificent and admirable collection of

¹ Revelation 13:17; Matthew 13:12

² Revelation 7:2-3; 9:4-6; 22:4

³ John 7:12-13; 9:22-23; 12:42-43; 16:2-4

⁴ Luke 15:1-2; 15:13-30; Matthew 21:28-32

holy Persons and not letting them finish the puzzle by perversely hiding somewhere the last piece¹.

For the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary to them – that’s how they calculate. When they have Him, they will put Him in the right place, and they will be able to teach others that trick² in good conscience and enlighten all those who, after all, can’t hold a candle to them when it comes to ingeniousness in casting nets on the birds of the air³.

That is how, owing to the big number of his servants and handmaidens, committed to the issue of the handy torch, the devil taught people to despise fools and to avoid them like the plague, because they could by chance catch the words of the one and only truth spoken by them – even the valid charges that they are abusing the name of the Lord, are thieves of the Creator’s copyright, worshippers of gilt images of the Incarnate, and that their mouths are dripping with the gore of lies and hatred of truth.

For then they would be in serious trouble, they would have a really tough nut to crack, hard as stone. They wouldn’t know what to do with such a bastard who fires at their false piety from such a powerful cannon, leveling their edifice to the ground and exposing to all its foundations and musty dungeons that are for the prisoners of their own convictions.

And the devil doesn’t want the Christians to have any trouble with knowing the truth, so he cleverly reaffirms everyone that there is no truth, and that certainly the truth is not God, because it doesn’t fight for its elect ones. On the contrary, it is they who should fight for it, win for it millions of Africans and thousands of Europeans, as well as guard it, so that no one steals or offends it.

“As for this Jesus, of course, He was, He died, and even was resurrected, but who knows if He’s really alive. Has anyone seen Him apart from those who had died a long time ago? In any case, no one knows why He wanted people to forgive those who trespass against them – it is ridiculous and a height of perversity to demand pardon for those awful, conceited changelings, who dare to argue (how outrageous!) that all have sinned and fall short

¹ Isaiah 29:11-15

² Acts 8:18-24

³ Acts 8:9-17

of the glory of God, and worse still, are justified as a gift if they believe some repulsive and spiteful vagabond, a rough and unenlightened thug who ignores even the most tactful remarks to come to his senses, not to sin so awfully and not to blaspheme, because otherwise someone would pray over him in such a way that finally he would see for himself who is the Master here.

Jesus truly didn't quite know what He was saying (He certainly couldn't have wanted that such a one be forgiven) – but He was in a state of grace and that justifies Him in our eyes, because thanks to Him we too can be justified by those lesser than us, who, in imitation of our humility before the Master, humbly turn a blind eye at the sight of our minor – indeed! – lapses and ignorance, because if they hadn't done it they wouldn't have had anyone to pray over them.”

But the Master didn't expect great things from his elect ones – He didn't want them to bend over backwards, walk on their hands, speak with their legs, convince others of things that they weren't convinced of themselves, pretend to be different than they were, perform exorcisms over rogues, flatter crooks and nod in agreement with those whose sins against the Holy One enveloped them with a shroud of death – a garment poisoned with bile and venom of a monster. He knew well that they couldn't afford it, so He only wanted them to speak with a human voice and try hard to remember and keep in their hearts exactly what they saw and heard from Him – because only that can not be falsified and distorted – so that in the right time those who respect the labor of ones greater than themselves could believe their testimony – and, like them, respect and honor with faith the labor and greatness of the Lord's mercy over them, not wanting any more to lose time and effort for nothing.

That's why the Master praised those two (and they wanted to be praised by Him very much) exactly for that – having been faithful in little things – because, after all, it costs very little to keep, with the help of the living God, and become rich through what one got from Him¹. Nobody is forced, enticed, exploited, robbed, nobody is envied or beaten. And the Master thought that this was the best², that's why He threw the door

¹ Isaiah 40:9-10

² Isaiah 61:6-9

open to them¹, because He considered them worthy of the great joy that they were to experience because of the wedding in heaven – the joy that they longed for so much.

And through this door He would send them his words of reassurance, and He strengthened them. And the mandates that they were graciously given for the sake of the chosen ones, which they carried out as they were instructed², assured them of the faithfulness and truth of the God who decided to keep them in the hour of trial which came on the whole world. And nobody could oppose them and go unpunished – not because they desired power, but because they loved the Ruler who gave them the right to judge.

Everyone who dared to do that, was consumed by fire from heaven³ – such as engulfed the people seduced by the hypocrisy of their companion, despondent and envious of God's throne, who was putting on a brave face, and on top of it all had but a very limited sense of humor.

In this way the word of the great prophet about those who were to come to worship the Lord⁴ every new moon and sabbath was to be fulfilled. The brightness of the distant moon⁵ lost its allure to them because it became close to them through the flesh and blood of Christ, which they ate and drank, satiating their insides with every word that came from the Master's mouth.

And it was given to them to look on the corpses of the transgressors⁶, whose own eyes, legs and arms were stumbling blocks to them, and that's why hell devoured them, because they played with its fire and self-righteously petitioned the Righteous One... *"that they aren't quite as they should be just yet, that they have plenty of flaws and misgivings and don't know how it is going to be in heaven and if it's indeed going to be warm and spacious, and what about water, and whether their flat won't by any chance adjoin the lodgings of a prostitute or – God forbid – someone who committed suicide, because then they would try to get a reservation for a suitable additional payment, and if there won't be any unwelcome guests there, and their haloes, whether they won't get in their way while bowling or skiing.*

¹ Isaiah 60:11; Revelation 3:8-10

² Isaiah 30:21

³ Isaiah 26:11; Revelation 11:3-6

⁴ Isaiah 27:13; 66:23

⁵ Isaiah 60:19-20; Revelation 21:23-26

⁶ Isaiah 66:24

And they must prepare well first, take all the receipts for the deeds of their faith, so it wouldn't look like they're coming empty handed, for free. For sure there's going to be some control at the border, some saint; maybe for a small fee (because saints are not greedy) he will tell them how to behave there, so that they won't commit any terrible blunder at this wedding, to which, after all, they were invited as guests, because it's the King himself who's getting married... "

... and a great deal of other similar doubts filled their noble and caring bellies and oppressed them till the end of the world¹. And the saints had great fun – by no means because of these people and not at their expense².

June 5th, 2000

¹ Mark 9:42-48

² Revelation 19:1-10

THE MEETING

The little boy must have been waiting for me, because even though he was busy with some work, when he saw me, he stopped and approached to show me a strange object that he made by himself. He wasn't looking at me too attentively, nor even curiously, as if my presence and my gaze were to him as obvious as the touch of a close person, and questions as unnecessary as paying a dead man.

I don't know where it was – maybe in the street or a waiting room of a station – in any case not in any of these secluded, luxurious places where people usually meet when they want to discuss important matters, to confide in someone or to kiss. Neither was it a center for progeria¹ patients, where children with old people's faces are surrounded by a strict cordon of their magnanimous families and doctors who teach them to live quickly at their expense.

The appearance of the boy, whose complexion was parchment-colored and dry as a desert, couldn't encourage any of the bystanders to shake hands with him, and every human gesture towards him would prove to be tainted by a stigma of grasping terror awaiting propitiation – if not

¹ Progeria, that is Hutchinson-Guillford syndrome, is a disorder with a hitherto unknown pathogenesis. No cases of family co-occurrence have been recorded. Death occurs under 20 years of age. This disorder affects children of both sexes and is independent of race. Since it has been discovered, around 100 cases have been identified. The symptoms of the syndrome can be best described as an accumulation of changes resulting from normal (usually spread over a longer period of time) degeneration of tissues and organs. Physical defects, alopecia, arteriosclerosis, skin lesions and circulatory system disorders are therefore not as much its characteristic symptoms, as marks of a systemic catastrophe that characterizes the short lives of the children suffering from that disease. I'm not acquainted with the descriptions of their mental development and I don't know whether its impairment can be categorized in equally

brief terms – that is whether they are unable to evaluate the pillory of educational authority according to the measure of human (and very poor in their case) experience given to the vast majority of mortals. If they are able, however, to disregard the special conditions of their own constitution, they have to know the smell of freedom much better than those not pressed too hard against the wall of truth by the awareness of their own limitations. "Jason from Idaho died at the age of merely 16 years. He had the stature of a child, but looked like an old man. His face was so changed that the neighborhood kids nicknamed him E. T. His internal organs showed symptoms of aging when he was barely two years old. At the age of 13, like other victims of progeria adulatorum, he had white hair, was losing his eyesight, suffered from osteoporosis and had cancer. The immediate cause of his death was a myocardial infarction" (author's note).

for the thought of meeting his peaceful and attentive gaze. Therefore none of the things that turn villains into saints and the other way round happened, as if in the space hardened around us, dripping with light, every movement and word was measured by a measure not of this earth, even though given to this earth.

Neither was there in the bearing and the expression of the boy's face any trace of the desire for praise and credit with which children passionately curry the stingy favors of the adults. It would simply be an offence against decency if I appraised his subjection as anything less but a start of a sentinel on seeing a general's insignia; in his move there was, however, no stage fright characteristic to earthly realities, which reveals the reluctance of the reporting officers towards the grand tasks and strategies of their superiors. There was no space in him for an empty word, a law without substance or a delay in the performance of a duty.

It would be hard to call the object held in his hands, strong for a child, a box. It wasn't empty inside, but full, homogeneous, and that in a way transcending human ideas of density of matter. All attempts at comparing this indestructible material with the singularities of the universe, binding particles of light within like giant space-bending funnels, would have to seem a little pathetic, because they wouldn't help anyone to grasp the difference between light and darkness in them.

Its hardness was reminiscent of ceramics, but dropping the object to the ground would expose the fragility of the latter, which would be shattered – not as much by its weight as by the power of the order determining it. There was, therefore, no space in it for anything that wouldn't be necessary; but from three sides of this intricately made object – when I put my ear against each in turn – three voices reached me, squeezed, fettered, or better – crushed by an extraordinary, but simple power.

Each voice sounded a little different, and even though giving someone an idea of the difference between them couldn't be done without the frolics of the most vain of minds, with some effort I could bring myself to highlight what was common to them. The voraciousness and squalor of those intrusive and bizarre segments that could in no way be called words wasn't the most ghastly thing about them – for these features are exhibited by many repulsive phenomena that ruin hope which are

craftily sweetened with the charms of the world and given to the gullible as salutary.

The thing that would raise the hair of everyone who hasn't understood and hasn't personally experienced the gravity of some special official orders and warnings of the Galilean could be most modestly explained by the image of the terror of a madman, stabbed by cold, derisive cackle of hell's emissaries, to whom death is, in comparison, like a soft pillow. If you placed a thousand glass slabs before him, he wouldn't think even for a moment on which his bloody body would be stuck.

I had to stoop to the boy's hands, listening to his *records*, and when I strenuously straightened back up, he raised his head and, looking into my eyes, said matter-of-factly: "*There's two left.*" What ran through my mind was: "*Two, only two, that's really not much.*"... And then I froze in fear.

My body was immediately shaken by a convulsion, the wellspring of which, ominous and overwhelming me from head to toe, was the furious groan and howl of a beast, the fangs and claws of which one could search for in vain in the annals of the wildest degenerations of human will. I only managed to remember who was standing behind me – anyone would lack the time and strength for more. But that was enough. I thought that it was after all worth it to do something for those who – like me – don't like to be surprised by the decrees of the Righteous One.

June 28th, 2000

*That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea.
And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down,
and the whole crowd was standing on the beach.
And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying,
"Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed,
some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up.
Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil;
and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil.
But when the sun had risen, they were scorched;
and because they had no root, they withered away.
Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out.
And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop,
some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.
He who has ears, let him hear."
And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"
Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know
the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.
For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance;
but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.
Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see,
and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.
In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,
«You will keep on hearing, but will not understand;
You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;
For the heart of this people has become dull,
With their ears they scarcely hear,
And they have closed their eyes,
Otherwise they would see with their eyes,
Hear with their ears,
And understand with their heart and return,
And I would heal them.»
But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.
For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men
desired to see what you see, and did not see it,
and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."*

THE MEMORY OF A DAY

The road¹ went along the known path of the dry riverbed. The armed kings of the dawn were to follow it, surrounded by greedy entourages and flunkys ready at their beck and call². The latter were missionaries in the fight for freedom, equality and fraternity. They were told to thoroughly trample down the meanest germs of life and hope given by God to the ones bereft of their rights before Him³.

Their task was very simple and insanely profitable – multitudes flocked to their anointed ministry, which in turn deprived them of the last scraps of their reason and decency. For everyone wanted to be useful, wise, mighty and recognized, and Satan's hired hands perfectly met the human expectations justified by them. After all, what they had to offer them wasn't peanuts: it was a pact with the realm of the dead⁴.

They were saying that God loved people at least as much as they did and that He didn't want them to be at war with each other, but to join forces and rout their invader and oppressor under his noble leadership. An unwritten condition of the agreement contained getting rid of hatred and prejudice, necessary in the eyes of their empowerer, using a thick black line dividing the ugly from the pretty.

All the voracious customers of that – as they felt – extraordinarily beneficial proposition were of course in total agreement as to the fact that those who weren't able to love their enemies⁵ were deserving of deepest compassion. They didn't expect, however, that thanks to the wonderful powers given to them they would discover in themselves such vast reserves of superhuman potentials that would enable them to forgive their children, parents, and even spouses. Some even managed to *remit* their arms, legs and eyes – so effectively that from then on they would catch, walk and look by themselves without the slightest qualms.

¹ Matthew 13:4-19

² Revelation 16:12-14

³ Psalms 66:10-12

⁴ Isaiah 28:5-20

⁵ Luke 17:4-5; Matthew 18:21

As a matter of fact, not everyone was delighted by that, and many bystanders were impudently resisting the obvious. It wasn't only that they didn't want to appreciate their spiritual transformation, but didn't even desire to turn their attention to it and fall to their feet in order to thank them for their magnanimity. But to the ones sanctified by Lucifer, the mere presence of the good-natured and lofty aura of impersonal mercy surrounding their bodies, to which they sacrificed their souls, was altogether sufficient.

No human experience could shake the hope that they had possessed; and either way, they only condescended to experience the things that pleased their zealous servants, so the taunt of a streetgirl or bird shit on a new overcoat didn't belong to things worthy of their reflection anymore.

Since that time they didn't ask for directions, because their own lusts determined the direction for the servants, greater than themselves, of righteousness lower than the heavens. Looking up at their dignified countenances, they barely noticed the iniquities of others, unless they turned against them in a coarse hope of getting back the money lent to them or the face dragged by them through the mud of empty words.

In general, however, the shining path of their faith didn't allow the human creatures who dared to demand from them any dues or a touch of reason near them for too long. So the flunkies of grace didn't even have to exert themselves too much to perform exemplary acts of mercy towards the apostles and prophets of the Righteous One, hated by them and absent from their ranks. The ones they had bought were entirely sufficient to their perky and arrogant formula of salvation, in which an opulent, pseudo-prophetic lament or resentment set in a lovely gilt frame appeared from time to time.

Prophets didn't bother the great kings in the least. The murderous façade of their sanctimonious missions, in which they were writhing in convulsions, convincing to the masses, of their (allegedly salutary) abasement, harmonized splendidly with the fact of the absence in them of the sources of comfort and support from which everyone was effectively separated by tasteful contempt for the thoughts and words of the Galilean.

These *safe saints* were even encouraged to prophesy and to issue mutually incompatible pronouncements and admonitions, in order to keep

in check the huddles of the doubting and the fearful, cramped together in their high thresholds, with fear of condemnation resulting from the ignorance of truths that allegedly only they had discovered.

On the plaster of those all-knowing chatterers, factual evidence of God's crime against humanity was even painted, in the form of immodest voices of holy indignation at the lack of God's Spirit in the oases of grace. As if it was the most obvious thing under the sun that those saints, catalogued and exalted by the devil, had Him. Those most licentious hellhounds would convince each of their inattentive listeners – and even a lame dog – that it was the Holy Spirit governing their thoughts and desires and that it belonged to the duties of their unruly flock to fulfill their most pious wishes.

There were countless such cranks. As a matter of fact, this had been foretold by more than one fine mind. And even though any sane-thinking adolescent could expose their foolishness and ignorance, light-heartedly ridiculing their inflation and sputtering of drowsy tomcats confounded by ordinary deodorant, proving by that to be wiser than them all – yet the power of the kings effectively protected the mausoleums of those holy corpses from a factual criticism of their actions. They were, therefore, given a wide berth – out of fear of their self-declared holiness¹.

The sores of their own malice², as well as the stench of surveillance diffusing through myriads of confidential tips, given by voyeurs of life, lascivious and cunning as foxes, didn't cause anyone's concern, and only rarely excitement. Hardly anyone was thanking God that he didn't manage, with the fawning help of those shameless bagmen and ignorant barber surgeons, to get rid of the entirely legitimate feelings of repulsion towards their garments polluted by the flesh³.

Their nobleness and forbearance for others' poverty had, after all, its limits, which weren't as broad as their bloated bodies drunk with the blood of the saints⁴. But it was enough to prick them like balloons by calling them liars – which was, of course, the only truth⁵ – and by demonstrating to them, based on the authority of the Scripture (which they spiritedly and noisily acknowledged) that they themselves not only didn't obey

¹ Isaiah 65:1-7

² Revelation 16:2

³ Jude 23

⁴ Revelation 17:6-18

⁵ Revelation 2:2; 3:9

Jesus' commands, but they didn't have even the slightest wish to familiarize themselves with them, stubbornly twisting their allegedly unclear meaning and haughtily cultivating some incoherent form of godliness, belligerent towards the experts, all too well embodying their erroneous ideas about God's generosity.

They immediately turned green with rage and started to go out, one after another, from their strongholds, underground hideouts and piles of sticks, surrounding the penitent that was unlike them, and the foaming venom of ridicule slithered to their mouths, dressed in haughty, serpentine manifestations of its justified lament over the ignorance and the obnoxious character of the changeling.

This vermin could be then bound by one juicy word. They suddenly forgot – not only about the commandments of the Galilean, but also, as it seemed, about the whole of God's world and the fact that they themselves looked in this world like bloodthirsty, infuriated riff-raff, instigated and incited against someone stronger.

Shrieks, groans and slanders seemed to reach heaven then – but they didn't. Probably the sole benefit of such childish (because, after all, not too costly) confrontation with their disorderly audacity, sulks and hypocrisy could consist in winning the attention of a witness, even a little inebriated with their wine, who – if he was able to keep his mouth shut and didn't have eyes in the back of his head – had to start doubting the credibility of his headstrong defenders of the one and only (and in special cases – double) truth. The costs of such eccentricities were, however, little known and no one felt like giving the lie to the words of the lackeys – even in his own name and for the sake of his near and dear ones.

The bodies of all those *devourers of grace*, trampling on bread and bathing in wine, were to be devoured by birds summoned by the voice of an angel. The birds got to share in the just judgment over those who, through their own greed and unbelief, became food for the creatures, insatiable, but justified – as opposed to them – in their passion¹.

* * *

The rocky soil² also didn't promise abundant crops. It was like the rapture of a vain girl who measures her charm and attraction for the un-

¹ Revelation 11:1-6; 19:17-18; Psalms 79:1-5

² Matthew 13:5-21

known benefactor by the same note of exaltation and admiration, allegedly flattering to him, and delightful to herself, which is to sound in the ears of the beast¹ before the crowds, charmed by him, will bow down to his image². And whether one would give her a flower, health or a word, she would receive it with the same natural assurance that the one who gives must be good, and it would be tactless to ask him who he is and where he comes from³.

If the difference between those who stood the test of fire⁴ and those who denied their faith when they faced the murderer and accuser of the brothers would be appraised, a strange concern for their own image could be noticed in the latter at the very outset, forcing them to make up for it with their face, their work, their speech and heaps of other gadgets, secondary in the fight for survival. As if one word from the lips of a neighbor could really turn their bliss into ruin, and another word could lift them up from doubt and terror in one moment.

"God shouldn't surprise nor astonish anyone," they thought. He should not have in Him that commanding, inexorable nature, elusive to their eyes. He should be smaller, less hardworking and less impressive than the eruptions of their imagination, verbal rosaries and bulky vainglories, so that they would be flattered by the thought that He was chasing them, not being able to keep up with them with such crude ministries as watering, fertilizing and protecting from the heat.

They would rather be inclined to admit – for they were ashamed of their antiquated fathers – that, *indeed, He made (with their major support) some progress in a matter as delicate and transient as the salvation of the soul, but that their own achievements in that area were much closer to perfection than the coarseness, not smoothed with a thousand of their reasonable sighs, of the Righteous One who ordered to cut off the limbs and pluck out the eye that were an obstacle at the threshold of the Kingdom*⁵.

The frailty of existence was in their eyes almost an asset, substantiating and justifying the desire for meaning and power based on rules contradicting common sense. Their short-lived enthusiasm, as well as

¹ Revelation 13:3

² Revelation 13:4-12; 14:9-12

³ 1 John 4:1-3

⁴ 2 Corinthians 13:5-7

⁵ Mark 9:42-50

the fact that they willingly stood as models for others – like corporals who passed for muffs and pushovers at the non-commissioned officers school – weakened quite a few branches seduced by the mirage of shade and blissfulness of people praising the name of the King.

For the first real difficulty turned out to be a fall in the eyes of those to whom learning how to walk should be free from signs of clumsiness and ignorance. That is why their charges promptly learned from their mentors how to avoid the fire promised by the Galilean, convinced that the Holy One can't take a joke, and surely He doesn't know when the fun starts and when it ends.

I doubt that they understood the limited competences of the Messiah in matters concerning personally them, even though for sure they spared no efforts and resources to make others aware that *God loved them boundlessly, for He never set any boundaries himself. It was done by evil people*, whom they didn't in the least feel like pointing out with their fingers.

It needs, however, to be said that they weren't too sure of the validity of such a conviction, because they never faced the trouble from which they wanted to save others at all costs. But because grace apparently flattered them, they were trying to give back to others precisely and exclusively what they had received themselves, standing up in defense of the disadvantaged – even those who didn't express the need for such defense.

They would call the heat of controversy and the sickly thrill surrounding the Lord's affairs *rain*, because they didn't have to ask for it – it was like the most obvious symptoms of a heat stroke and appeared like the cholera or the bubonic plague everywhere they went. So the conjecture that it was the grace of the Almighty running abundantly down through their mouths and hands that was to be awarded with the commotion in the ranks of their sisters and brothers seemed altogether unforced.

Anonymous denunciations in so-called *good faith*, subtle allusions and a veil of utmost discretion ensured to the *sycophants and peepers of grace* entering into arrangements with them constituted the canvas of their public activity measuring the progress of others with the scope of their own influence over them and their fully loyal ability to leech off of human gullibility.

It didn't require great keenness to notice in their calculated cunctation a symptomatic concern that their gift, words and ministry could be left without the response that they expected and not oblige anyone to reciprocity, which was fitting in the currency exchange offices – not because they put too little effort in them, but because they didn't acknowledge the efforts of the Righteous One, who surrendered himself into the captivity of their sinful designs in order to convince everyone that they were rotten to the core and would indulge their abysmal lusts even on the Father's emissary.

Because that's what happened. They made of Him an exceptionally disgusting idol, repulsive to decent people, that had to be necessarily reckoned with, because He was issuing concessions for acts of mercy¹, but not necessarily known and loved as oneself. He was great, generous, and even good – although it wasn't obvious from their looks – and they said that it was possible to enter into quite profitable arrangements with Him.

The lucky ones weren't pointed out with fingers, they weren't bad-mouthed, and some of them managed, with the help of his allegedly inexhaustible grace, to draw limits of familiarity around them, phosphorescent from far off, both for enemies and friends, so that neither of them would trespass into their territory, guarded by trained dogs.

The talk about such ones was that they had *personality*, *charisma* or something like that, and the more mendacious ones were given titles of men of God, cardinals, apostles, pastors and a whole lot of handy, but completely inadequate designations that exposed them to the ridicule of sane beings. This envelope allowed them to perform *ex cathedra* in front of people who didn't have it, and didn't even know what it was and what purpose it served – they only knew that one can't eat it, can't smell it and can't touch it.

On the rock, it was a terrible sin to want to flog them and even those who were vigorously telling dirty jokes about them would quirkily bow and scrape in their presence like at the court of an emperor. They surely had children and wives who passionately sacrificed their children to Moloch and to whom a sacrament from their hands was like a cornucopia

¹ Revelation 13:11-18

overflowing their bodies craving for priestly caresses. And they would tear to shreds with their own hands everyone who would dare to draw in even a mole on the noses of their images, unblemished by drudgery. Except when the prankster would turn out to be the husband.

For hatred towards a husband wasn't a condition of following into the footsteps of the Messiah (unless the husband drank like a fish and mingled with bad company) and nothing would justify – apart from that *man of God* or other *fringed robe* – their own distaste at the man's irritation at the sight of a staggering increase of the maintenance costs of grace, allegedly salutary to women.

The women's grassroots initiative, however, was efficiently upholding that evangelistic zeal, slightly baffling to the outsiders – especially if they improvidently encountered rambunctious or spoilt flocks of innocents clinging to the ever shorter skirts of the woebegone mothers.

And the forbearance of the latter for manly quirks, whims and vain-glories prevented the menace of inflation and deficits in the budget of the most serious sponsor of grace after God – even when, to the mute anguish of the women, a Sunday morning was sometimes leavened by nervous vent of the hard-working and usually even-tempered masters of the house.

All that mutual admiration society, forced to be happy, felt uncertain only in the presence of the Holy Spirit. That is why so much time and learning was devoted to definite prescriptions for his receiving, spending and using.

Fairly rationed-out vouchers were to provide everyone with access to dreams of his power and love, so a well-organized system of subscriptions for shares in the Kingdom worked well everywhere where the achievements of popular revolutions weren't questioned, and the fondness of the oddballs reminiscing the state of emergency or even the coup d'état were put off with deep distaste.

The only thing that was lacking were the effects of that proletarian co-operation that would be convincing to the fine minds, and sorrow would inhabit them at the sight of successive ploys of the salvation propaganda calling a criminal *respectable*, a fool *noble* and a witch *blessed among women*.

All that was to be burned by the heat of the wrath of the living God¹. A long time ago He recommended the faithful precautions very different from sun-protection creams, which were, in the shared concept of the manufacturers and the users, to make a virtue of necessity.

Also those who didn't want to ever pass for ridiculous were to be forever mixed with the dust of the ground by heroism. They would thrust their chests out on hearing the distant noise of news from the salvation frontlines, so that no one would by any chance see them as cowards and losers.

And even though the mockeries of the unfaithful spread in all corners of the world, hardly anyone doubted that what was to turn out to be a sign of the Father's generosity was to be the admirably good mood caused by memory lapses, trouble with erection or the crooked legs of neighbors, ingeniously covered by a pile of tips of goody-goody pops from hell or eager impulses of pity from women of easy virtue, deftly drowning out the voice from heaven.

Only few rose above the thicket of prickly thorns – those who fainted at the very thought of appearing among the noble, energetic brothers and sisters anxious about the future and rich in life experience, united by the forces of nature that were ungracious to them.

The humpback was looking at someone biting his tongue after having mentioned carrying burdens in his presence.

The changeling racked his brain as to the purpose of the frantic rant about the norms of Christian life and rules thanks to which he himself surely wouldn't acquire any reason.

The elderly man with a nose reaching to his chin noticed with surprise the sudden embarrassment of the preacher who had just eloquently spoken about *the smoke in the Lord's nostrils* while looking at him.

And the boys and girls rightly seeking someone with a measure in his hand were amused for a moment by the thought that they would rather die in the most tantalizing anguish than from boredom, which has no arms, no legs, no head and doesn't speak in a human voice.

Only those who never happened to forget about their reflection in the mirror² were reaching the sky in an incessant and silent plea for mo-

¹ Revelation 16:8-9

² James 1:22-27

ments of solace that are unreachable without hope for an entirely new body, free from blemish. The rest rubbed in repellents and perfumes. They were creating their image with such passion as if, compared to their enterprising aspirations, God's work was an *act of small-scale production*, barely noticed by them, fading in comparison to the flamboyant evidence of their self-knowledge.

The foresight of some even made them cautiously doubt whether the free-for-all style of proclaiming qualified its masters for a prize from the hands of the Lord's Servant and whether his blessing really touched the mouths of the MCs and muckrakers. They submitted their statements in writing, so that they couldn't be accused of negligence.

The most mendacious ones were striving to make the impression, beneficial to them, that they knew even their weaknesses. They moved others with memories of stealing apples or a book (the objects of their passions were always desirable and justified, in a way, their moral slackness, common to all people). They only prudently shunned the taboo of youthful love-affairs, as if the thing that makes everyone an enemy of the living God was at most as unbecoming as the transgressions of beggars worthy of their own lament. The awareness of thousands of vile whims and smears above which they had raised themselves gave them the right to a note of nostalgia after the land of children's dreams, to which there supposedly was no return.

In their presence many thought that God wouldn't want them to return, when in their closets, like after a lost sheep, to the moments when they were so ashamed that they didn't know where to hide their gaze, because even a professional murderer wouldn't be able to explain to them why and which lusts led them to the edge of the abyss.

Due to that, many also never kicked up in despair – like a football – the yearning feeling that God's openhandedness doesn't reject anything, and for sure not what they had rejected themselves, but it transforms and purifies every imperfect impulse of human will – even the smallest in their eyes.

And if their Lord represented himself as a thief¹, maybe it wasn't because He felt inexpressible disgust towards their small thefts, but because

¹ Revelation 16:15; Luke 12:39-40

He wanted to overhaul small thieves to make great ones out of them, so that a burglary or bank robbery wouldn't burden the taxpayers, but the guardian of heavenly order.

And if through debasement and disgrace from their hands He himself dared to become less than a thing, it wasn't in order to deprive the idolaters of all thought of respect for his own craft of making and dividing things that even the eaters of daily bread who were the greediest for valuables didn't dream of.

Arrogant boasts, covered well with the charm of hypocrisy, choked out quite a few germinating plants to which the lese majesty committed against the Almighty was the golden calf, and not the whip-round of his people for the image of the Uncreated One molded from earrings of Egyptian gold at the order of a priest obsequious towards the impatient elect¹.

The God-cursed earth reluctantly harbored within her the powerful, soul-refreshing thought that if the fate of the damned is much worse than the fate of the wretch, incapacitated by infirmity for thirty eight years², and the mixing of the blood of the Messiah's compatriots with the blood of the sacrifices they had killed³ is merely a modest approximation of the torment and vengeance for rejecting the hand of the Righteous One and insulting Him, then all the attempts at regaining the saving balance and gracefulness using one's own hands and the ingenuity of *interior decoration experts* are similar to the efforts of a drowned man with a stone around his neck⁴, but more futile, and the whole overblown *methodology of faith and proclamation* is very likely the blackest page of the history of the gospel, written down a long time ago, of the Son of God whose death brought on earth benefits wholly different from those that his Empowerer would have wished for. Because the demand for cheap Egyptian advice has been since that time skillfully shaped by the impotent executioner of human consciences and herald of a dawn not convincing to the faithful.

Those who grasped it shivered at the very thought that one could talk about the God whose voice they heard in a language different than the one given by Him – the speech that strikes with its absurdity the plas-

¹ Exodus 32

² John 5:5-14

³ Luke 13:1-5

⁴ Luke 17:2

ter, beauty and order created by arch-human power, because it is the purest fruit of begging for them in the moments that one doesn't wish on a worst enemy.

That's why they became silent, like sheep led to the slaughter – because they understood that if someone is so angry and speaks about it as openly as the son of a carpenter from Nazareth, it meant that his love and generosity are unrivalled. For no killer and scoffer shakes fists and uses strong words – they simply can't afford such a gesture towards their debtors and wrongdoers.

So they thought that there was due time for everything and if they were to talk about what they had seen and heard in the language of mercantile terminology, full of flattery, bragging and gossip, small magic and great bows towards the public – they would prefer to die on the spot, like someone who would like the earth to swallow them up out of shame for disobedient children.

They also thought that they weren't as alone in their desire as, say, a fly in a bottle *with great prospects for the future* – more like a seed thrown into the dark ground, which hasn't been promised much, but for sure it has been promised that the Farmer and Lord of the great harvest would take care of it.

Their plea wasn't heard by any human ear, because the requests that were put forward to them as models at the counters of grace became to the sowings as the threats and admonitions of the Almighty pronouncing an eternal curse on the petty savers of God's grace, desecrating his name¹.

Their fight for the lives and consciences of the Lord's saints wasn't noticed, or even anticipated by any militant nor suffragist – none of the ones decorating the graves of the righteous². It was noticed only by the Son, brought back to life from death, sitting at the right hand of the Father, who showed to his Parent those worthy of his promise with a shaft of light.

The Lord's hand overshadowed and sprinkled every, even the smallest bit of the ground, which in no way resembled a playground for children, a running track with hurdles, a circus tent nor the New York stock exchange – none of the many places where people count on dividends from

¹ Hebrews 6:4-8

² Matthew 23:27-32

their anxious investments in companies with an impressive, but limited fund of the goddess of fate¹. Grace caused something to emerge from nothing, and the thing that was something she turned into nothing.

She loosened the tongue of a mute man, opened the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf, turned a slacker into a sage and a rogue into a noble man. And the other way round – she shut the greedy mouths of babblers, blinded those who saw, smashed bats against street posts and deprived the wise guys of reason and cheap decency². For that was her fancy.

And she did that while graciously crediting the growth of the most inadequate creatures, pained by their own destitution. Their existence isn't substantiated nor covered on this earth by the policy of the great, invisible superpowers which rations out love, news and daily bread in exchange for the bow of the depleted public opinion, upon which it preys³.

* * *

A long time ago a certain Man was sitting in a boat at the seashore and saying strange things over the heads of the listeners who surrounded Him⁴. His day was hard, like every laborer's⁵. The blind were demanding a sign from Him, the insane – reason and the fops – refinement.

Not much came of it for them, like no amoeba has so far managed to convince anyone that a human being has no arms, legs nor head. That Man also had a head. Therefore, He didn't say the things that everyone already knew. He only said the things that, without Him, no one would ever have heard⁶.

He wasted no time, because He didn't have much – exactly and only as much as a defendant in the courtroom who calls the judge a corrupt scamp and spits on the jury. He had, however, a big problem: He was God. And that's why He did none of the things that are sometimes the inglorious share of mortals tried before the court for tax frauds or high treason, and even those few unjustly convicted based on clues and conjectures.

¹ James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17

² Matthew 11:25-26

³ Revelation 13:11-16

⁴ Matthew 13:1-3

⁵ Matthew 12:22-48

⁶ John 8:25-30

The Greek sage, before he drank the poison (agreeing by that very act with the unjust sentence passed on him by the earthly authority), remembered a small debt, and his great disciple reported the conscientiousness and courage of his master, as if it was him who the witnesses of his greatness were to learn modesty and humility from¹.

But the memory of the Galilean was intact as well, and yet He didn't embellish his appearance on Golgotha with any scruples that make the neighbors think that when death is approaching, it's time to settle debts. For He knew that He was about to pay off the biggest of debts, in spite of the hopes and claims of the *creditors of the Almighty*.

He didn't have in his hands the receipts for his magnanimity nor a defense speech. Neither did He have a disciple greater than himself² or an umbrella for those He was calling children. He was too small to be called God without great emphasis³, but too great to escape the croak of the ruler: "*Behold, the Man.*"⁴

He was despised and rejected by mankind, but He told the women not to lament his fate⁵, and the men not to try to do his work and substitute Him without his will, but only to fulfill what He had commanded.

He also promised to the faithful greater things than those He himself was doing⁶ – and only such a promise is worthy of the highest respect for its dispenser – for it costs the Father much less to open his taps and gates at the request of his beloved Son than to close them and lock them tightly⁷ at the plea, consistent with his will, of his frail and a little balky offspring who know the last chapter of the book of Solomon⁸ and a couple of other minor remarks of the Righteous One.

July 6th, 2000

¹ Socrates' (469-399 B.C.) last will is often held up as an example of great virtue. In Athens, Socrates was sentenced to death for impiety and corrupting the youth. His last will instructs his friend to return to Asclepius a borrowed rooster (author's note).

² John 15:20-26

³ Matthew 16:16-17; John 20:3-9

⁴ John 19:5

⁵ Luke 23:27-31

⁶ John 14:9-17

⁷ James 5:17-20; Revelation 3:7-8

⁸ Ecclesiastes 12:1-7



Exposition

Jesus heard a lot that day – even for a Savior of the world. An unfaithful servant would be already put out – not by the imputation of dealings with Beelzebub¹ – he wouldn’t be able to rebuff it even if he was surrounded by thousands of adherents – his annoyance would have to be raised by the very guardedness² of the supposition of the witnesses of the miracle performed by him that he could be the one he claimed to be. Jesus, however, not only exposed the absurdity of the claims of his direct opponents, demanding from Him the recompense that the people of Israel expected from Moses³, but also stepped forward as the opponent of his generation⁴, also including in the judgment over it his own family that desired to *rescue Him from his delusions*⁵.

Driving out a demon wasn’t in his eyes anything worthy of greater attention, although He himself knew well that if the superhuman ghouls wouldn’t scamper away at his order, tormented by the inner glow of the Incarnate, there would be few to deem his advance on the way of the sea and beyond Jordan⁶ significant in the bloody history of the world. His testimony, however, was much more modest than the picture of the messianic ministry, overpraised by the *triumphators and propagandists of grace*⁷ who hold the reviving breath for *air freshener*. There weren’t many who took seriously the Savior’s simple and explicit suggestion that the demonic power over human life, the bonds of which no one but Him was able to overcome, didn’t fill his contemporaries with a disgust deep enough to consider the power of the Spirit of truth the last resort.

Whereas Jesus explicitly declared that bodily infirmity and disability are merely like a pimple in the place where the sun doesn’t shine, and

¹ Matthew 12:24-25

² Matthew 12:23

³ Exodus 4:1-31

⁴ Matthew 12:34-45

⁵ Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:20-31

⁶ Isaiah 8:23; 9:1

⁷ Acts 16:16-17

if those seeking for true relief would like to see his Empowerer, it befits them to absolutely possess the sole warranty that resists the blasphemous invasion which deprives of reason much more efficiently than one muck, obtrusive to the body. He formulated this thought bluntly in many of his speeches, and the image of the hypocrites whose fellow believers were twice as mendacious as themselves¹ was to become permanently established in the minds of those born again of incorruptible seed.

The discourse that was to explain to the disciples the gravity and binding character of the testimony of truth, formulated for cover in parables, was ended by Jesus with words² that could be understood by an attentive listener in only one way.

If it wasn't given to the prophets and righteous men to see what He sees, it means that the desires, longings and hopes of those beloved by the Righteous One didn't bring many of them even a hair's breadth closer to the real image of God until He himself deigned to reveal himself, sending *someone like Him* in the time and place most fitting to his design.

Jesus intentionally used such a contrast to highlight the thought, taken up later by Peter in a letter to his faithful³, that unrighteous people – that means those who don't respect the dispositions of the Almighty that had already been issued and who are prejudiced against the people they see⁴ – can't even dream of obtaining the grace of life and the revelation of his glory – even if, thanks to some miracle, they saw a pie in the sky or a resurrected mother-in-law.

Because by their obstinacy against accepting the basic fact that God was incarnated into the shape of a man whom He knew and chose himself in order to take the side of the ones despised and rejected by people, they question the idea, offending to them, that He has done something for them exclusively for the sake of who He is himself, in no way taking into account even their noblest endeavors, and all the less their aspirations, so that no person would boast before Him about the thing that makes him greater in the eyes of his neighbors.

So they contradict the thing that they very eagerly confess, aiming at God's right to the privileges of authority and the cornerstone of their faith that are indispensable to them. By that, they act unjustly towards

¹ Matthew 23:15

² Matthew 13:11-17

³ 1 Peter 4:15-19

⁴ Luke 16:31; 1 John 4:20

someone who, like Jesus and the apostles, dares to disclose the enormity of their disloyalties towards the commandments from mount Sinai, and nowadays towards the core principles of the teaching and ministry of Christ's mission.

In both these cases, familiar to them, God saw and sees the reason for which the presence of the herald called and anointed by Him is the crowning argument of his firm dispute with people holding Him for someone else than He is, and at the same time a kind of warranty out of consideration for the chosen ones. Because to the latter, in whom He takes pleasure, the Almighty isn't an honorary participant of a doctrinal conference where people negotiate between each other *which thoughts about God are allowed and which are not allowed*, but the only Being to whom it may be risky to attribute frothiness.

If, therefore, God is allowed to do something that is out of the domain of human endeavors, limited in their temporary and particular point of view – and it would be difficult to deny that in terms of the core principles of faith – then He can see one very important reason for which the testimony of the bunch of faithful, chosen and called by Him, is to outmatch and bind with the power given to it the testimonies lacking the thing that He himself values most, because it brings Him glory. Thus the minimum of two or three witnesses, established by Jesus as the condition of his presence among people¹, can rank in his eyes as an obligatory gathering binding others with its own judgment² – if it's true that they love God more than others.

Those who reject the gospel testimony of truth or try to belittle its rank to others would then find themselves in front of Him and the assembly of angels and saints in a position similar to the position of the High Council getting rid of Jesus or the thousands of communities invoking Him, which, over the ages, repeatedly rejected the voices of the witnesses of his greatness that were inconvenient to them, but faithful to the commands of the Messiah.

At first glance, such a situation could seem pretty unusual, but not improbable – at least to those who attentively read the Scripture and learn from the mistakes they made, which are painful to their consciences.

¹ Matthew 18:19-20

² Jeremiah 9:1-15

What could seem much more incredible is concerted resistance against leaving in God's hands the exclusive prerogatives to do things that are much more extraordinary and worthy of attention in his eyes than healing, and even resurrecting thousands of bodies, which isn't the exclusive specialty of the Savior and guardian of souls.

For from what is commonly recognized it follows that people don't like the truth and instead of the testimonies that embarrass them they prefer its appearance, which will ultimately cover them in disgrace in the face of the Holy One as a result of their acquiescence to the deceptive designs of satanic rebellion. Thus, it is among the most important goals of the Spirit's intent to secure and seal the testimonies dear to the Almighty and to protect them from abuse (even if it costs the lives of his servants and handmaidens) that would take away his glory.

If it wasn't so, it would be fitting to agree that people know the truth and obey it, and the world is a paradise, since truth reigns in it, which makes God's visitation something little to be desired – not regarding what is to come, but what is. Paul personally confronted the effects of such quackeries, mentioning the delivering of Hymenaeus and Philetus to destruction¹.

Of course, nowadays Satan has a different strategy, because he is not a nitwit, but a murderer and he knows well that asserting that the resurrection has allegedly already happened will raise in the owners of the knowledge of the Highest amusement at most. It is, however, worth it not to be too eager to ridicule the *ignorance of the father of lies and all perversity*, for sense of humor isn't the exclusive domain of human beings, who, after all, know well the saying: *he who laughs last laughs best*.

It may, however, turn out that, despite their frenzied anticipation of the Lord's coming, the majority are expecting to see someone else than the one that is to come, and it is a matter of utmost importance to reveal the actual foundation of human expectations and hopes in the moment when it isn't yet too late for that.

Parables were addressed to people who rightly assumed that the Messiah was talking about the Kingdom. Nevertheless, only the handful

¹ 2 Timothy 2:15-18

surrounding Him wondered at the fact that Jesus was using images and words that were often bracketed by the phrase “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear,*”¹ which weren’t an unambiguously worded *encouragement to join the ranks of the blessed*. The Master took this curiosity² for a vein of true discipleship, still hidden from the eyes of his elect, which was – through the Father – aware of the sharpness of the difference between themselves and *them*.

Jesus was able to teach them and to direct their mental efforts exclusively because He had a foundation for such a distinction, of which He was already aware in his childhood³, and because of the experience of a special grace, making Him – through his obedience to the Father’s will – greater than the disciples.

We don’t know whether He expounded to the disciples the meaning of all parables. It is doubtful, considering that at the end of his teaching He entrusted them to the Father’s will, which He was fulfilling himself, giving them an example of faithfulness. This will was turning the disciples, through the Son, to hope and faith in what was promised by Him, so that the Holy Spirit would help them in their weakness, introducing them to truths that they wouldn’t have been able to bear earlier⁴. It is more likely that Jesus limited his explanations to showing complex fragments of spiritual reality in such a way as to allow the disciples to grasp the very principle shaping his way of thinking and the ministry and message style that was still alien to them for a long time after.

An indirect premise speaking for the lack of ability to expound the broad meaning of Jesus’ parables among the disciples is the absence in the apostolic writings of any references to the majority of the parables that are best known today thanks to them.

Despite that, Jesus managed to mark them with the Father’s seal in such an unobtrusive and original way that until today it is impossible to find competing linguistic patterns that would consider it their honor to demonstrate to the neighbors the direct connection of the word proclaimed by the Master to an extraordinary, unprecedented determination of those people in fulfilling the Lord’s orders hidden from others.

¹ Matthew 11:13-15; 13:1-9,13:36-43;
Mark 4:21-23; 7:14-23;
Revelation 2:1-7; 13:1-9

² Matthew 13:10

³ Luke 2:42-52

⁴ John 16:12

It wouldn't be a very risky conclusion – for it has its independent foundation – to put forward an ingenuous supposition that despite their *pare-sis* in introducing others to the meanings of the letter of the Word kept by them, the apostles and those who believed them were a whole world closer to the preferences of the Rapturous One than their contemporary exegetes, to whom the knowledge about the Word of God has become an idol much more demanding and a thousand times more voracious than the God in human form recognized *pro forma* by the world.

Because this One didn't waste his precious time on futile reflections on the life-giving stream – He was the life-giving stream. And He ordered his *pupils* not as much to teach, but to make disciples. That is why I think that the inclination was completely alien to the apostles to pile up useless knowledge (which could, however, be used to impress neighbors), which nowadays is sometimes almost synonymous with godliness. Because the Master, by the power of the image of his powerful figure, didn't leave them room for indecision and dilemmas concocted by the *imitators of just anyone*, croaking after the first random fashion. He, so to speak, purified them with his own purity and filled them with his own power so that they would be able to act like He did.

He was, in a way, giving himself to them by saying what He wanted to say; knowing that He was saying what He wanted to say and demonstrating that self-knowledge so that the disciples could believe that his gift was a gift of One greater than Him, whom He trusted until the last moments of his life. It was this very authority to judge, of which He was speaking as if it was given to someone He was incarnated into, remaining who He was¹, that set Him apart from all the living and gave Him the right to describe all the *saviors* that were before him as *robbers and thieves to whom his sheep didn't listen*², because the usurpers of messianic mandates lacked in the eyes of the sheep the very characteristics of that self-revealing will of the Empowerer of the messenger.

A listener not bound by calling could hardly make out from the parable of the sower just the fact that the Messiah sees some difference, known to his eyes, between the fate of the seed thrown into fertile and infertile soil. None of the thoughts available to him directed him towards reflecting on

¹ Matthew 11:27; John 5:19-27; 17:1-3

² John 10:7-15

the peculiar characteristic of the unexpectedly introduced farmer, sowing his grain just anywhere.

Even the heads of the disciples didn't clear up after Jesus assured them that they had been given the knowledge of mysteries hidden from others – for indeed it wasn't the same as possessing their understanding, which was, after all, granted through faith, which was difficult to find in the apostles who were childishly competing for primacy.

Jesus yanked at their jealous ambitions with irritation at the sight of their dullness¹, but it is hard to believe that it was supposed to signal more at that time than the fact that only the One who was standing beside them knew the exposition of his parables, and if they really considered Him the Christ, they should have thought that He had spoken the only truth about his Father. And since the Father gave Him his exclusive mandates, He did it because He knows his Son who does his will.

A similar effort of the Messiah could be observed near Caesarea Philippi, where the Master once again placed in front of the eyes of all the disciples the fact of their utter ignorance concerning the goals of their own calling and ministry. The disciples were well informed about human opinions concerning who their Teacher was² – much better than could be expected from today's allegedly impartial creators of public opinion.

Jesus, however, consistently presented them, using the example of Peter, too hasty in judgments, with the necessity to acknowledge their ignorance concerning the will of the stranger whom they addressed as Son of God³, which could turn out to have far-reaching consequences for them.

In one of his last speeches, Jesus once again undermined the foundation of their certainty – and did it in a situation when He actually shouldn't have objected, because the disciples were telling the truth about Him in the following words:

*"Now we know that You know all things,
and have no need for anyone to question You;
by this we believe that You came from God."*⁴

Jesus, however, knew perfectly well that their confession wasn't a confession of faith – and He didn't want the disciples to get the impression

¹ Mark 4:10-13

² Matthew 16:13-14

³ Mark 8:29-33

⁴ John 16:16-30

that it was Him who demanded it. That's why He met their statement with a prophecy concerning the forthcoming test of their faithfulness¹, so that they wouldn't remain under the illusion that they were able to help out the Son of Man in his ministry towards themselves.

It is, nevertheless, worth it to notice the absolute value of the apostolic reflection (which Jesus didn't question in any way, and even based his terrible statement on it), demonstrated by the disciples' discovery, recorded by John, that their curiosity was useless to their Master and that in order to please Him they shouldn't as much know what the world thought of Him, but whom He himself served. And they could learn it from only one Person.

The gist of Jesus' abasement was defined by John with a precise phrase of one of his letters, in which he demonstrated to his charges and reminded them that God's love consists in something entirely different than the ideas of it characteristic to his contemporary disbelievers².

But it was yet before the death of the Messiah that the disciples understood that true greatness doesn't need questions smaller than itself – it gives birth to them and directs them where not only an answer can come from, but above all support for those who would drop out on hearing it out of season³. In other words, it dawned on the apostles that Jesus' doubts and dilemmas concerned only the scope of the matters that they were yet to discover with the help of the Spirit of truth, acting like He did in faith in the generosity and warranty of his Empowerer.

Nowadays, teachers think that they act according to the truth by eagerly speaking about subjects not assigned to them by God, because it seems to them that if they restrained their tongues they would lose something that is indispensable to them to feel who they are. They clumsily prop themselves up with the confessions of the Apostle who argued among the Corinthians against empty conjectures about his person circulating in the church and put on the line his own sense of decency to illustrate to his faithful the fundamental difference between him and his adversaries⁴.

But while Paul really knew whom he served, attributing such an asset to any of the generally acknowledged teachers of the present means

¹ John 16:31-33

² 1 John 4:10

³ John 16:12-23

⁴ 1 Corinthians 9:12-18

opening oneself up to ridicule and justified contempt of anyone who would try to substantiate his voluntary access towards the ministry of those involuntary (indeed!) stewards. No one paid Jesus for speaking – that’s why He always spoke about a divinely *assigned* subject, which can’t be said about the contemporary *saviors of the world*.

It is hard to say when the apostles started to feel like being the doers of God’s word. But when that happened, none of them thought – even though they certainly all transgressed gravely – that without the Holy Spirit they were able to deal with the mysteries of life and faith reserved by the copyright of the Creator¹. What is happening today would raise the hair of every apostolic head, because to the disciples who knew the voice, hand and will of the Messiah, inexorable towards them, it became clear with time who the *evil one* was and just how evil he turned out to be. It also became clear what the *stealing of grain* consisted in and how to prevent it, as well as what was meant by *inconsistency of mind, offence, persecution for the word, tribulation, love of the world and its deception*.

Whereas any contemporary exegesis of this passage displays total unawareness of the scope of the prophecy due to the limitation of the reach – comic indeed – of the basic terms used by the Son of God, accompanied by a complete paralysis concerning the ability to convey to others even mere hunches pertaining to the dynamics of the Teacher’s goals, which flowed from every apostle’s head, driven by care for the conscience and faith of the weakest, which means those who don’t utter a voice², but know who can be trusted and who shouldn’t.

For it was only the fruit of God’s righteousness that was to be an identification mark on the narrow road of faith – both for the small and the great. Jesus, knowing what this righteousness consisted in, gave the disciples in the parables an outline of the basic threats for the germinating seed, pinpointing the shades of the powerful, sinister attempts of his adversary, which were soon to be effected on the gullible believers in one God who weren’t strengthened in the truth. All the subsequent efforts of the apostles were focused on the Lord’s will, indefinable to unauthorized servants, serving to separate the faithful from the lies of

¹ Romans 8:9; 1 John 2:4-27; 4:2-20; 5:10-12

² Proverbs 31:6-9

these misleading spirits whose goals and means were illustrated by Jesus based on specific prophetic prints concerning God's wrath against the unfaithfulness of his people.

A glimpse at the evident signs of ruin and breakdown of social ties and at their causes in an undeeptened understanding of Christ's thought will ensure every truly sensitive conscience that the warnings and priceless instructions of the sages from God's grace are worthy of being treated more seriously and penetratingly than it is done on the Christian agora.

While I don't think that I have managed to show more than a small piece of the knowledge of those blasphemous phantoms lording it over with a worldly newspeak in the minds of the believers, especially that I have intentionally avoided (!) the escalation of means of emphasis while describing the phenomena that are an insult to God, for the naming of which there are no words powerful enough, but anyway half my kingdom to him who saw, understood and managed to formulate in, after all, everyday words as much as I was given.

Because if he did that, I doubt whether he is in his right mind and whether he is alive, for the costs of such news as mine are somewhat like the costs of a messenger in full battle armor who once ran the distance from Marathon to Athens; only that in former days the people waited for the news of the victory of the commander, and today they celebrate the victory of someone who had lost, for the Messiah still offends people of little faith.



So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, He gave them bread out of heaven to eat."

Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven.

For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

[...]

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, «And they shall all be taught of God.» Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.

This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves.

He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."

HOSTAGE OF EARTHLY TERROR

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set free those who are oppressed,
To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."*¹

When one day Jesus declared in his hometown that the words of the prophet had just been fulfilled², He didn't inspire great enthusiasm in the listeners gazing at Him – in any case not the kind that his Empowerer would have wished for³. For the stir in the synagogue wasn't caused as much by the fact that Jesus spoke, but by the fact that He said exactly what He wanted to say.

Everyone present knew well that the quoted words of Isaiah⁴ announced a mighty mission of the living God. They had also gotten used to the thought that the bonds and distress of the chosen nation were to be brought to an end by some great compatriot of theirs, proclaiming the gospel tailored to their hopes and expectations. They didn't, however, see the important reason for which they were to abandon the measure, distorted but dear to them, that gave them the not too costly right to infertile judgments of others' actions.

The unrest that Jesus caused with his explicit suggestion that his contemporaries might lack faith in the God whom He was representing just then⁵ undermined that arrogant certainty characteristic for those people – that they knew enough about God's purposes not to fear the judgment day. The news that spread through Galilee didn't belong to such as are usually called *good* – worth at least a sizeable fortune. It was rather sensational, and for such one can get some money only today.

¹ Luke 4:15-20

² Luke 4:21

³ Luke 4:22

⁴ Isaiah 61:1-8

⁵ Luke 4:24-30

There was a gush of dread, and even though obvious signs of messianic greatness appeared before the eyes of the inhabitants of Nazareth and Capernaum, the words of the Wise One didn't become closer to their ears than the voice of the demon binding the man in the synagogue:

*"Let us alone! What business do we have with each other,
Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us?
I know who You are – the Holy One of God!"*¹

The surprise of the witnesses of the extraordinary speech of the prophet and the supernatural manifestations of his power wasn't greater than the admiration for the modest feast that He held soon after, around Pass-over, satiating over five thousand people² already familiar with the sight of the mysterious herald of bothersome news. However, the tight circle of disciples surrounding their Master made it known to the outsiders that his mandates had to cover something more than just the power that the most gracious of the judges and prophets of Israel wouldn't be ashamed of.

Jesus was issuing orders and everything He commanded was being fulfilled. And the disciples, although they were a little dazed by the scope and gravity of the messianic power themselves, pricked up their ears even to the weirdest commissions and teachings of the Father's emissary. Apparently Jesus placed some special expectations on them, distant, however, from the expectations of the master from his servants that are known to every man on this earth. And even though the disciples clung to Him like dogs to the hand of their owner, only perversity incarnate would be able to convince the masses that a closer acquaintance with this hidden ruler of souls was an offence to everyone.

It wouldn't have occurred to any of the apostles to demand from Jesus signs confirming the credibility of his mission. They were sure of it³. Although their conviction was worth as much as the certainty of well-mannered terrorists who resolutely took as a hostage the legitimate heir of the throne, desiring to force his parent to change the political order, but the disciples' greed didn't offend Jesus as much as the designs of the witnesses, inattentive and greedy for their own glory, of his royal

¹ Luke 4:31-37

² John 6:7-14

³ John 6:42-48

manners and the abasement of the Lord's Servant that was less obvious to them.

Therefore, the great Galilean was doing what He could to explicitly discredit the value of that servile prostration which was incessantly expressed to Him by the multitudes of idolaters deprived of truth and the demons tormented by his penetrating inner radiance.

The latter would disperse at the word of the Incarnate like will-o'-the-wisps before a hurricane that suddenly burst into the marsh; it was, however, difficult to Jesus to ensure the masses, eagerly testifying of his power, that the exemplary thunders over the bodies of wretches tangled in lies don't give anyone the right to flatteries and insinuations about the Son of Man that are meaningless in the eyes of his Empowerer.

That is why He himself avoided like the plague¹ the imposing, but vain evidence of self-knowledge that was presented to Him in a futile, idolatrous hope that He himself would credit with extensive favor the not too expensive human concessions for the new, unexpected image of the Father's mission.

Jesus was pure – much purer than human tears, so without much ado He declared that the will of the Father is to make of his elect shameless freeloaders and bloodsuckers² – with the reservation, of course, that it isn't all the same to Him at whose expense they are to live on this earth the sole life worthy of its name. The listeners, however, were offended³ by this announcement, unworthy of a King in their view, and the direct, definite incentive to consume the food and drink unknown to them – even though undoubtedly many of them hadn't just stood aside when the disciples had been distributing the loaves multiplied in the Lord's hands.

The *creditors of the Holy One*, versed in Scripture, wouldn't have trouble remembering the testimonies of the scrolls the undertone of which turned against the pride and haughtiness of those elected by God's grace, even in the picture of the commander of the army of Aram, hostile towards Israel, who was healed by Elisha⁴ or the widow – from Sidon, equally distant from Jerusalem, which had become loathsome to God –

¹ John 6:14-15

² John 6:53-55

³ John 6:52-60

⁴ 2 Kings 5:1-14

taken care of by Elijah in the years of the draught devastating his home country at his word¹.

But despite much similarly obvious evidence for unconcern towards the prophetic calls and warnings, Jesus' smallest allusion that the called heirs of God's inheritance wrongly insisted to see in the Lord of thunder an intransigent enemy of their adversaries, caused only an ominous murmur of holy indignation in the ranks of the defenders of the truth, cheap and very impractical in the scale of eternity, about the Father of Abraham and his descendants².

* * *

Earthly reasons fairly dispatch squads of trained commandos into places where negotiations with kidnappers might not achieve their goal and not save the lives of the hostages, which might be short anyway. At various times, however, it turned out that the calculations of the rulers are frustrated when they want to free themselves with their own hands from the persecutory phantoms, seeing in the elect, anointed with holy oil, enemies of the people of God that they allegedly oppress³.

Three thousand years ago, king Saul sent his troops into the settlement of the prophets three times. The hostage of the Holy One, hated by him, hid there under the wing of Samuel, faithful to God⁴. The shepherd taken from the flock took away, by God's decree, Saul's glory – mercifully granted to him for the sake of the welfare of the unfaithful inhabitants of the Promised Land – which the greedy ruler diminished by elevating himself above the law of Moses, dear to David's soul.

In the end, he himself shared the peculiar fate of his ruffians, committed to an ignoble cause. Like them, overcome by God's Spirit, he lay naked in front of the guardian of the revealed truth, causing a considerable surprise of many sane people, expressed with the justified question:

*"Is Saul also among the prophets?!"*⁵

David lived to a ripe old age, slipping from the hands of his numerous enemies, who were joined even by his son⁶. But his distant descendant of the promise of the Almighty didn't live half of the days of Jesse's son,

¹ 1 Kings 17:1-16

² John 8:15-20,31-33,37-48,51-59; Luke 4:28-29

³ 1 Kings 18:17-18; 1 Samuel 22:8

⁴ 1 Samuel 19:20-24

⁵ 1 Samuel 10:9-12; 19:20-24

⁶ 2 Samuel 15:1-16

because – to the deep disapproval of the *defenders of peace on earth* – He substantially enlarged and strengthened the company of God-resembling hostages of the truth, becoming an unrivalled Teacher of the most effective *terror*¹ in the bloody history of the world – the terror towards the ... friends picked out by Him, in a modest conviction that it is better for their enemies to hang themselves at once than to touch, by a gross mistake, the apple of the Father's eye. It is possible and worth it to wonder that with such a conviction He lived as many days as He did on the tainted earth.

The eye of the Everlasting One closed for a moment at the sight of the unprecedented murder of his beloved Son, who was praying to Him for forgiveness for his oppressors, who were unaware of their own disgrace and debasement. But from then on, everyone who would be weighed down by the plowshare of the saving plow² or by the need to compensate to his not-too-greedy creditors³ would fall into his mighty hands⁴.

The apostle Judas, even though he had less to lose than the grasping king of Israel, drew conclusions from Jesus' lessons too late⁵ – only after selling the flesh and blood of the Surety of the weary and thirsty, obsequious towards his executioners, who by no means demanded from his envious elect one such a great deal of complaisance towards the concerted will of the Jewish sages and lords of this world⁶... But the time of grace wasn't ended by that – it has begun.

For although thanks to Him the false promise disappeared from the eyes of the *blackmailers* called by God, and along with it the hope for dirty profit bought with their own not-too-noble blood, hope dawned on these *angry men* – and along with them on many more – for pure profit⁷. They were induced to it by the Spirit of truth, who was effectively convincing the faithful that they had swallowed the right hook – even though invisible to them – but even the worst people on this planet won't justify their own disbelief before God⁸.

And if they themselves become like the great Hostage, whose Father really tried pretty hard to match human perversity and who preferred

¹ Luke 12:49-53

² Luke 9:61-62; Galatians 6:3-5

³ Hebrews 10:28-31

⁴ Matthew 18:28-30; Romans 12:18-21

⁵ Matthew 27:3-5

⁶ Luke 22:2-6

⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:17

⁸ Matthew 17:24-27

sober enemies of his Savior to his drunk double-faced friends, they will even be able to receive, one fine day, a reward worthy of the servants of the most important Assessor¹ and Merchant² in one person.

Before that, however, it is fitting for them to show concern not for what is human, but for what is God's, and to take a closer look not as much at the multitudes expecting another supply drop or another *joke* of the Creator, as at the fragments of heavenly bread³ left by those who are easy to be fed by God, but not easy to be converted.

For it is only those leftovers, expendable to the world, that will be gathered to the glory of the Father by the Spirit of his Son, who once told the disciples to do exactly what God had intended⁴, wanting in his unfathomable mercy to gather the remnant of Israel into twelve full baskets⁵ denoting the number of the tribes, dear to Him, but scattered in just anger⁶.

Neither passionate whisperers of rain, nor charmers of sacrifice-hungry demons, nor errand boys, nor seventy-seven-for-a-cent sages – none of the haughty creatures⁷ whose crown gets in the way in stooping over the crumbs of the heavenly bread – will be found in these baskets.

But they will contain every bit of human being which gives praise and glory to God with an unveiled face and hands that don't bluster against the Creator for the tears running down their own cheeks⁸ and for the joy of their enemies⁹ that is unlike the lighthearted, but sober joys of the saints.

For God loves only volunteers who know well that the old world is still divided from the new by a narrow *gate of desperadoes*¹⁰, who won't – not for anything – allow anyone to free them from pious thoughts about violent men like them, and their dreams, hidden from the greedy eyes of liars, about free fare at the expense of the greatest among the *prisoners of others' convictions*, who – although with dread in his soul – allowed his executioners to think that God the Father doesn't have a right to his *trifles* and *vainglories* on behalf of all those who suffer in front of Him

¹ Matthew 13:44-46

² Matthew 13:45-46

³ John 6:12-15

⁴ Revelation 7:2-5

⁵ John 6:13-40

⁶ Revelation 9:4-6

⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

⁸ Jude 16; Revelation 16:9-11

⁹ Revelation 11:7-11

¹⁰ Matthew 7:12-14

neither from diligence, nor reason, nor courtesy, expendable at the truly grand court.

Only thanks to that sacrifice the faithful know – even today – who values grace above his own life and who sells it from behind a high counter¹, so that no one would try to check whether the servant is really standing or hanging.

August 14th, 2000

¹ John 6:64-70; 13:4-19; Revelation 13:17

A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days. And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans." The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.

THE AUTHORITY OF TRUTH

One doesn't need to believe in God to admit that one day, almost two thousand years ago, the apostle Luke reached for a pen, desiring to serve with his testimony those who were awaiting salvation. Neither do the events described by him demand faith. It clearly follows from them that in a certain Roman colony there was an uproar resulting from a blunt action of his sorely enraged friend¹.

Faith is only necessary to those who are trying to find an answer to the question whether a servant of the living God can be angry and how much – and if he can, then what can enrage him. Luke didn't turn a blind eye to the annoyed Paul – by no means inadvertently. Inadvertence isn't befitting for a writer – all the less for a witness of God's works. Quite to the contrary – extraordinary intensity of attention, characteristic to the anointed, faithful to God, allowed the words and images banned by the contemporary prospects, possessed by a ravenous aversion towards the Judge of Israel, to be recorded on scrolls, expensive at that time.

There are good reasons why Luke mentioned that the fateful incident took place in a leading city of the district of Macedonia. In a different one, where people's lives would be less organized, and reasons for glory in the native corner less obvious – it would have been a lot more difficult, and maybe even impossible, to notice at first glance the sores of satanic malice burdening the lives of the servants of the Gospel of the Son of God. Indeed, the stench coming from them was fierce and Paul had to feel nauseous at the thought of the hypocrisy of the inhabitants, deluded at their own request by a wench possessed by a serpentine spirit.

If today someone would like to make clear to his neighbors the background and reasons of the perversity making the ones who hate God recommend to others his protection, he would have to experience exactly this repulsive, sugary smell of rot, compared to which the fetor of decomposing corpses can be satisfactorily compared to the smell of cheap perfume.

¹ Acts 16:16-24

Of course, he would be, indeed, obliged (due to the need for solidarity with the fate of the saints) to clash face to face with the virulence of the blind who think that a nose will be of no use in heaven, and even that the blessed look better without these *canine attributes* that make them too penetrating for the expectations of indolent prisoners. To our witness, however, it would be a trifle, because those born of incorruptible seed aren't pushed, but led by God's Spirit.

He would hide the true work of his mind from the eyes of the *commissioners of grace* so different from the one he has experienced himself. He would do it almost unwittingly, as if he was born with this defect, bizarre in the face of earthly realities, with this want, offending to others, which allows one to fly into a sincere and pure rage at the sight of the eggs of a cockatrice taken care of by blasphemers.

This work could be compared to the work of a boy placed at the plow who concentrates all his attention and effort on not tipping over along with the tool that is too heavy for him. The purport of that comparison would be sharpened if we added that the boy would prefer to die of exhaustion a hundred times and feel on his face the cold lumps of the resistant fallow a thousand times than to take his hands off his plow even for a moment.

This relentlessness, seemingly entirely unimaginable, is impossible to approximate with any human measure. For all creative efforts, recorded abundantly in the history of the world, would lack in the eyes of the assessor exactly this shocking determination (and to be more precise – self-determination), which is curt towards the allures and sweetness of earthly riches and privileges. None of these documents displayed even a small part of the intent behind people like the boy I know – it was simply outside the scope of their competencies and powers.

But Luke knew which way the wind was blowing. That is why his sparing report of the events in Philippi didn't exclude the first of two women who once bent God's will towards two entirely different commissions for his faithful servants. And that's not at all because he himself considered Lydia, the seller of purple fabrics, a model of piety and humility.

That's the opinion of those who shiver at the thought that a woman could be given something that was taken away from a man. Lidia by

no means appeared in the official register of the blessed on account of herself, but through what God accomplished in her, and what the witness of his torments, called by God, gave a reliable testimony of. Her example served the assessor to stress the difference between the Father of Light and the father of lies.

Luke's account suffers from such unheard-of modesty that one would like to *pin him down* so that he would *spill* everything like during an interrogation, which the masters¹ of the working girl, greedy for the glory guaranteed to her by them, didn't demand at all.

This man, however, knew that you cannot get water out of a stone, and where there is no faith, not even a drop of rain will fall – and that's why he did only, but exactly what he was to do – described a true story in such a way that everyone who would believe him wouldn't go away from the throne the debtor of which he had become himself.

He had a great Helper in this down-to-earth, tough mission – that's why the quieter and quieter echoes of the events described by him can be extracted from the clatter by the poor in spirit. For this Helper supports them as well.

They think that the world is probably really coming to an end, since they haven't met in any of the books that they came across a trace of disgust of their authors towards the splendors of their empowerers, who deprived many a widow of her savings so that she would buy yet another lie about the Savior of the world.

They also think that if these people lie, taking credit for the accomplishments that are the work of others, greater than themselves, it means that there is no hope for them, for they stand in the way of those seeking true power and greatness to which they don't have access themselves. And since they act like that, having spurned the prophetic instruction of those whose words they invoke, can they care about anything more than the masters from Philippi, to whom the firm dismissal of the spirit of the python by the apostolic authority was an unpleasant surprise?

* * *

Nowadays, the proclamation of the gospel of the Son of God has to be aided by slogans, posters and advertising campaigns – as if the Holy

¹ Acts 16:19-22

Spirit didn't feel like personally convincing men and women to lend an ear to the news of the messenger in a human form.

And He really doesn't feel like it, and the right, might and authority belongs to Him. Because God isn't a participant in the public debate about himself – He is its Judge; He isn't a slave of human views and opinions concerning salvation – He is the Savior; He is neither an orator nor a soothsayer with blinkers over his eyes and ears – He is the speech that created the world....

And He will create it anew. With a new heaven and earth, and with new people – with a new life, the germs of which God placed far away from the poisoner's venom, so that no greedy scamp and Lucifer's lackey would be able to say with impunity that God spoke to him or commanded him something.

For God doesn't speak to scamps and a certain wise man from Tarsus knew that. That's why he stamped his powerful leg in anger at the sight of a blasphemous intent that was trying to proclaim to everyone that it wasn't so.

Little is known about the miserable girl who was released from satanic bonds. Maybe only because the spirit of the great serpent encircling the whole earth with its coils miscalculated this time by teasing the sense of smell of the lion of God's gospel. Her name wasn't preserved – for the names of the possessed rightly don't occupy official registers.

But what was preserved was the memory of the day when the truth about Jesus was disclosed by his Spirit, as well as the name of the seller of purple fabrics, dear to Luke, who absolutely wanted to entertain her benefactors – like Zachheus, the customs officer whose pious desire was easily guessed by the Master of Nazareth¹.

For the despised official wanted to finally see the likeness of the Father's figure that would nod to him in a friendly manner and speak to him more gently than those who are giving bribes to the Almighty to this day in order to secure for themselves a worthy place at the dining table.

To this very day their bloodthirsty frenzy, united by the mystery plays of the unclean spirit, is sharpening its sanctimonious claws to get everyone who – like Paul – is modest enough to allow themselves to take

¹ Luke 19:2-6

a moment's relief on the side – especially on those who confused altars and think that no one informed God about it.

For the calculations of the tallymen fail and the ratings of their grace nosedive when on the market of mercy smoke issues from the nostrils of the buffaloes in the heavenly folds, propped up against each other. For then even the blind see which way the King walks and whether his hand really is too short, as the twisted divinations of the serpentine children proclaim.

The seal of the apostolic office was applied by Luke in the place the exposition of which is scrupulously omitted by falsifying eulogists of God's love who can't tell manure from jam. They would like to think that Paul should have dismissed the roguery of the Roman magistrates who didn't only wish for peace of mind, but also for a clear conscience at a low cost by the magnanimous release of the victims of their own cool, calculated ruthlessness.

The fear for their own skin at the news of the demand of a Roman citizen¹, however, effectively sobered up the representatives of law. Otherwise they might never have had the chance to wonder whether the dictum of the self-appointed guardians of the rule of law would always be profitable to them.

Paul knew well that those who beat him and Silas to a pulp for a supposed street row were mere pawns in a great game aiming at the defamation of his Chief. And the queen² on the chessboard of the Judge of Israel doesn't attack the pawns of his adversary without reason. Therefore, he didn't hold it against those unaware of their own disgrace that they beat him up without reason – he didn't hold anything against them. That's why, together with his companion, he was singing a hymn of praise in prison³.

He wanted, however, to teach a merciful lesson to his heedless persecutors – such a lesson that couldn't be taught by any ringleader of urban riots who usually eagerly demand (in his situation) a lawyer and explanations.

¹ Acts 16:35-39

² In Polish the *queen* is known as the *hetman* – the name of a major historical military-political office (translator's note).

³ Acts 16:24-27

Paul knew what he was locked up for, whom he served and who was protecting him. The only thing he didn't know was whether the morning star of David would ever shine on his torturers – not at all because they were worse than others; after all, he himself could consider himself worthy of the worst dungeons – but because he knew that in a city where the satanic lobby was being plastered by a witch, the Holy Spirit could convict concerning sin and judgment only those who didn't and still don't know what they do.

It was only the jailer and the flunkies under the orders of the servile magistrates who could be the first to whom it could seem extraordinary that this prisoner, setting a shining example of dignity, discretion and a balanced spirit, was accused of factiousness. Paul understood the gravity of his own assets perfectly, but hardly anyone on earth would be able to abase themselves to such a degree as to – like him – not take a penny for their recognition.

This cunning, noticed by his faithful friend Luke, is taught – praise God – only by the Holy Spirit. Otherwise saints wouldn't be able to sleep in peace, for they would be permanently haunted by the thought that they're paying too much for the gospel – much more than their rivals with hands stamped with the mark of the beast. No – it's the latter who pay more, for they care more about aiding God than about getting help from Him themselves.

But there won't be anyone to pay for their own toil and sacrifice, and their followers will fail in their hopes, having taken these liars at their word that God is good. Yes – He is, but it matters to Him who is speaking about it – a sheep or a goat. Whether it is the one who pays back his own debts or the one who claims to be paying back the debts of his neighbors, showing God the courtesy due to a convict.

The abovementioned arrogance is rightly punished by the Almighty by absolute blindness and delivered to the sword of the Spirit of truth without the slightest qualms – which the liars and slanderers of his hand are hoping to find in Him.

* * *

From among the prescriptions for the renewal of life and faith found in the hands of imaginary invalids, one of the most expensive ones is

the one that tells them to *release God* – whereas one of the cheapest ones (because it's free) is the one that advises to listen to Him attentively. For ages Christians were being convinced that they could afford to buy the first of the mentioned two. It is being done so effectively that today, in order to belie a murderous intent, it isn't enough to try to get a night's lodging in a cave full of lions – such a proof could have its gravity in the times when human beings were still distinguished from ravenous beasts¹.

In order to achieve that, one doesn't need as much as to exceed the speed of light (which is – as it seems – the favorite intoxicating passtime of Lucifer's servants), but to simply turn on the same lamp that once shone for the Lord's saints. Such a feat will dim even the brilliance of the spotlights in the circus tent where the tamer of wild animals, accompanied by the drum roll, used to put his head into the gaping mouth of his obedient pet while thinking about his paycheck.

And it will dim it because it will enrich the gazing audience with the priceless doubt whether the Christian yearning for unity isn't the bottom of an inhuman passion of *uniting heads* in neither of which space for the thought of spiritual food can be found.

It has to be admitted in all earnest that the passions of the frenzied bigots don't lack audacity. It isn't worth it, therefore, to take away from them the scrap of conviction that they did and are doing their job. It is worth it, however – and Paul in Philippi knew that well – to drop a broad hint of Zerubbabel in the presence of the idolaters, which will convince more than one guardian of their dungeons that no one will manage to entice the Holy Spirit², even if the devil managed to pull his old trick of blurring in the eyes of the world the difference between an eunuch and someone who's circumcised – and, along with it, the difference between those who would like to remove the members that are troublesome to themselves and those who would like to take care of their hygiene and decency.

The women's *grassroots initiative* rides high today – not only in corners similar to the former Roman colony. It is indeed hard to find a place on earth where the warranty of God's righteousness would be more val-

¹ Daniel 6

² 1 Kings 22:14-25

ued than efflorescence of imagination of the foremen of the teaching about salvation. Making a boom over their heads with a paper bag inflated with the Lord's Spirit is, however, enough for them to become covered with cold sweat at the thought that *maybe it's the Lord himself coming already*.

Undoubtedly, more than one saint was sorely surprised that flesh-and-blood people give their souls with such eagerness to phantoms with consciences starched by cheap whitewash. There is little written evidence for that, but those who feel Scripture intuitively and associate with good company don't need a lot of evidence. They will surely understand why Paul once looked into the throat of a beast and did something that can be best explained with the expression "*Peekaboo!*"

For liars wish that there would be no truth and that those who proclaim it wouldn't exist. The magistrates understood perfectly well what the stakes were in the game with this *vagabond*, so they quickly smoothed their tangled hair, apologizing to the apostles at the wish of their Spirit, so that next time they would at least think whether the Master of those they beat up isn't by any chance greater than their masters, and maybe even than the emperor.

Because if He is, He may not be a Roman, and what is even worse (but it's better not to repeat that) – a Christian. He may simply be God, for only God wasn't born anywhere and doesn't aspire for the colors of any nation.

And when it comes to the Jews, He likes them and that's it. He has to like someone anyway, because He is Someone, and when someone is like father Abraham, God likes him a lot. For Abraham sized up the king of Sodom in one glance; that's what was enough for him to give an answer to the beast which didn't know the measure of this world¹. Likewise, the Apostle received from above a retort to the satanic schemes aimed at endowing the magistrates with a nimbus of nobility for giving freedom to those they had declared outlaws themselves.

He didn't allow that, like the day the father of faith didn't allow a Sodomite to brag about his own magnanimity towards God's friends, for he

¹ Genesis 14:17-24

sensed that depravity begins exactly with their light-spirited assent to the stealing of the grain of God's great forecasts.

September 20th, 2000

*Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi,
He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"
And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah;
but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."
He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"
Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona,
because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you,
but My Father who is in heaven.
I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church;
and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.
I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven;
and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven,
and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."
Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.
From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem,
and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes,
and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.
Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying,
"God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You."
But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!
You are a stumbling block to Me;
for you are not setting your mind on Gods interests, but man's."*

HEART OF MADNESS

There is an appointed time for everything.

And there is a time for every event under heaven:

...

A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones.¹

The smell of freedom spreading through the Transjordan around a mysterious wanderer had been bothering the mean guardians of human consciences for a long time. Some messianic slip of the tongue would accommodate the Pharisees and experts in the law, but because even a small familiarity with the Galilean rightly seemed too costly to them, they were trying to chill the hearts of the enthusiasts of his miracle-abounding ministry in a more roundabout way.

The indocile pupils of the Anointed One were probably the most convenient asset of the argumentation that was to discredit in the eyes of the people the credibility of Jesus' calling for the office of the Judge of Israel. *"What kind of dignity is it that allows the rabble to behave so badly without the slightest embarrassment?! They don't pay, don't wash their hands, and if one allowed them into the temple, maybe they wouldn't spit into the chalices, but their defiant glances would surely spoil the lofty atmosphere of the cleansing rituals."*

The concerns of the priests were justified. Undoubtedly, none of the small apostolic heads suffered the burden of an excess of reverence for inanimate objects, even sacred ones; but it didn't seem to the outsiders that the Messiah was offended by the company of this *assemblage of unclean creatures*, as the not-too-scrupulous proponents of the Old Testament law would like to see it. Whereas it seemed that the ungraciousness of the disciples in judging some words and actions of the rightful heir of the Father's estate could effectively compete with the actions of his future executioners.

In such cases the Master would react immediately, calling his charges to an order known only to Him. Sometimes He snarled at their dullness

¹ Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

and made it very clear to his hot-blooded, but shortsighted compatriots that the Father's enmity can't be appeased by jumping the fence of cowards and wrigglers.

The disciples were simply under the influence of the teaching of mendacious judges and even though the Almighty had already carved in their minds, like on a clay tablet, the letter of his eternal mystery, they didn't have the slightest idea yet as to what it meant and where it was leading them.

To the unloved, it is easy in this world to worry too much about the one who took them in. Thus also the *dirty dozen* objected in unison when the Messiah sent to hell without any ado the messengers from Jerusalem who were bothered by the dirt behind the nails of his elect, exposing their shamelessness and hypocrisy¹.

Besides, the gospel testimonies unanimously settle the little popular fact of the esteem of the disciples for the otherwise powerful scourge of Pharisaic teaching. It is easy to be established by trying to find even one confrontation with it that was worthily faced by the Lord's protégée before the sending of the Spirit of truth.

The conviction of the disciples wasn't worth much and Jesus knew that well, so when He heard the comment that because of Him the esteem and honor of generally recognized celebrities had suffered a loss², He only obtained another piece of evidence, painful to Him, that for the moment He himself possessed the glory and honor due to the King of kings only *on paper*.

The disciples clearly wished for their Master to establish peace *in a more peaceful way, and maybe not necessarily at the cost of the sages from Jerusalem – they would gladly select the victims by themselves ... from among Samaritans or other rabble offending their small consciences*³.

The Messiah was, however – not only in that case – relentless. But before the time came for Peter to experience exactly the same dismissal for hypocritical claims of which he had recently been a slightly embarrassed witness, Jesus had the opportunity to pointedly demonstrate the value of his ministry to those not weighed down by the murderous judgment of

¹ Matthew 15:1-12

² Matthew 15:7-13

³ Luke 9:51-56

the elders of Israel, with its excess of qualms in benefiting from the benevolence of the Incarnate.

The Canaanitess, aching with the anguish of her daughter, certainly knew nothing about the disciples' dilemmas. She knew, however, that with the Messiah the stake was life and obtaining from Him the form of atonement that was dear to herself not only wouldn't sully the testimony of truth that she discovered, but could even be beneficial to it. Hence Jesus treated the desperate woman, who was still more sane than his own disciples, kindly. Nevertheless, by small suspension of her request He husked from the bowels of his charges only another untimely expression of concern for the blasphemous image of the Deliverer¹.

The disciples didn't even dream of a place among the greatest in this world; they only counted on a prominent role of the pride of the fallen kingdom taken captive by the invader – too modest in its own eyes to dream of real power and might and too greedy in the holy eyes to reach for it and give from the dignity taken by appropriate force² to the unworthy and previously humiliated by it.

Jesus was to *redo* them to the glory of the Father's name, but – at least on the surface – it was heavy going for Him. The disciples didn't want – not for anything – to indebt themselves in vote offerings from the lavish purse of their Sponsor. They somewhat resembled a miser who, having incidentally found a great treasure, sat on it, fearing only that he could be robbed – not even that he would first be killed.

Jesus was their living support and hope. "*What will happen when He is not there?!*" – they were thinking, afraid to ask Him about this matter, almost as vital as He himself³.

Meanwhile, the Master was persistently doing his work and his openly expressed confusion over the dullness of his *treasures* didn't, even for a moment, diminish the deep conviction of the causal power of the warranty given to Him, which had been once expressed by Isaiah in the following words:

*"Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.
And I will wait for the Lord*

¹ Matthew 15:22-28

² Matthew 11:11-12

³ Luke 9:44-45; Mark 9:31-32

*who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob;
I will even look eagerly for Him.
Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me
are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts,
who dwells on Mount Zion.”¹*

It didn't matter anyway to the Pharisees whether Jesus' disciples had something on their conscience. They did – a lot. But in their eyes they didn't have the right to call themselves the children of the living God, the flock surrendered to Him and accessing the throne of grace without limitations drawn with a human hand; the body in which the speech of power flows directly to its members, reinforcing them, building them up and encouraging them to fight in such unity that the experts in the law, divided in many problematic issues, didn't even dare to desire.

Therefore, the Pharisees were not offended by the embarrassments caused by the Master exposing each of their deceptions in front of the disciples. What they were offended by was hatred – hatred towards the sanctions of that authority that gives to the evil and the good without measure, exclusively – to put it a little teasingly, in a language known to customs officers – *through connections*.

But even though Jesus fought the Pharisaic venom virtually with his *left hand* (if we cautiously assume that this was his less able one), true feats – testified of by the protocols of the Lord's saints – were accomplished by Him among his ever inebriated pupils, given to Him by the Father's right hand, who acted towards Him much more boldly than any of the emissaries of hell could afford.

He who thinks that the battlefield of the spiritual fight of the Messiah consisted in his clashes with the Pharisees and all who sought to pick a fight with Him, is wrong. He might as well accept Descartes or Schopenhauer as his spiritual guides and end up somewhere else than where he had hoped to go.

The true battlefield of the messianic struggles, and especially their style, is visible in Matthew's report of the events near Caesarea Philippi, where the Master decided to put on a little show.

¹ Isaiah 8:16-18

When we take for granted the difficulties that Jesus repeatedly found in the minds of his charges – difficulties with accepting the most basic content of his message (roughly speaking: that God became man to save the world), it is easier to understand the method that Jesus used after a repeated, futile emphasis on the need for extensive prudence in handing down sentences:

"Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees!"¹

Summing up the already expounded issues, one could say the following:

Jesus knows that the disciples' power of judgment hobbles, tilting to the side of his great adversary, whenever He has to disclose the knowledge that puts in the pillory of the power given to Him all the *graduates of the law*, that is those who, not having possessed the rights of the Giver of life, act as his assignees and middlemen, falsifying the picture of reality to which they have no access as a result of their own unbelief in the binding character of the decisions that had already been issued.

Noteworthy: Jesus always turns his interlocutors towards their own backsliding from the letter of the law.

The first of the questions that the disciples are asked here refers to their own knowledge about what people think about the Son of Man.

The second question paves the way for the comparison of the judgment of people from outside their circle, known to them, and their own judgment, the source of which they aren't aware of. The disciples don't know why their judgment is different from the judgments of others, a direct evidence of which is even the surprise of the disciples that the Master is speaking to others in parables (concealing the meaning of the spoken content), expounding them to themselves in private².

Peter thinks that he knows who he is dealing with and demonstrates it by his confession. He also believes, even though it isn't written anywhere, that he has already possessed the right of the

¹ Matthew 16:6

² Matthew 13:10-17

Giver of life and that he is beyond the reach of the evil that touches the ones who are unaware of the truth about his Interlocutor, which he knows.

Jesus knows that the knowledge of Peter and his companions refers to deception, which means something not backed up by any law and any reasonable will, for they are a part of a world and age in which, through the teaching of the Pharisees, arising lustfulness, almost everyone thinks himself worthy of messianic support, but no one wants to get to know Him better, rather presenting to his eyes votive offerings filling Him with repulsion.

It's somewhat like with the gossip about an expected and desired newcomer, which, in his absence, takes on the characteristics of a basic necessity, and when it becomes a necessity (for the greedy care about it a lot), woe to the newcomer if he doesn't do what is necessary.

The value of the source of the knowledge given to the disciples is unknown to Peter. Jesus stresses this value. His emphasis can be translated into the phrase: *"You're lucky that you owe the knowledge about Me to my Father. If it was otherwise, there wouldn't be any hope for you¹."*

By that, He grants to his disciple direct knowledge concerning the reason why he should consider himself blessed. It was beyond the shadow of a doubt to the Master that the beings that were best informed about his identity were not people, but demons². It doesn't seem, however, that He encouraged them to cooperate in the work of salvation.

The climax of Jesus' short scenario for the benefit of his listeners is a unique reshuffling of the meanings invoked so far, the aim of which is to highlight by contrast the difference in the outlook on the domain of the power of judgment given to Him. The masterfully staged framework of the situation that takes place can be noticed in the part that is common to all points of view:

¹ Matthew 16:15-17

² Matthew 8:29; Luke 4:41;
Mark 1:34; 3:11-12; Acts 16:16-17

"They say..."

"You say..."

"And I tell you..."

Only the third and last of the statements is marked by deep inner awareness of the source of one's own conviction and the significance of the knowledge announced to Peter¹. But here, the most delicate nerve of the messianic speech doesn't refer to any of Peter's supposed assets, or some predispositions purportedly noticed in him by Jesus, as the puny plagiarists of the Wise Man from Nazareth would like to see it.

It evokes neither a compliment nor a commendation, nor anything at all that would exalt this alleged *prince of apostles* from among the handful of lost sheep called out by name. It is something quite to the contrary – something that sets an example by abasing and ruining the booming attestation of the disciples' self-knowledge, in spite of the accompaniment of the sneers of the learned men, so tangible that it hurt, who preferred to see the ones worthy of bearing the palm in those greater than themselves.

Volumes have been devoted to the logic of the sentence from verse eighteen, and the funniest of them heroically present their small weapons, allegedly to the confusion of the *conjurers from the Vatican*, seeking in the Teacher's reference an indication to the person of the Master, as if the only purpose of the lesson in Caesarea was reminding the true-born Israelites what had already been known even before David – that the rock of their salvation was God.

Whereas the troubling pronoun in Jesus' statement is nothing else than a reference to the power of his own judgment demonstrated before, giving to each lost sheep (not only to Peter) a new name according to the oracle of Jesus' favorite disciple, sounding enigmatic until today:

*"To him who overcomes, to him I will give
some of the hidden manna, and I will give him
a white stone, and a new name written on the stone
which no one knows but he who receives it."*²

¹ Matthew 16:18

² Revelation 2:17

A programmer will easily understand this expression as a reference to a previously declared procedure, inside of which an appropriate command of self-confirmation was placed. But a picture that would probably be closer to the soul of a peasant (and that's what it is about) is the image of a wayside pub where a somewhat weary, but mighty wanderer, among companions who aren't very sober and disbelieve his news, seals the value of his testimony by striking his fist on the table.

One could even be tempted to present a richer image of a fettered prisoner with a soul of the judge Samson¹ and a speech of a deliverer for the testimony of truth for his empowerer put into his mouth – the testimony for which none of his companions, even the one most interested in deliverance, would give a red cent for.

Jesus simply shifts the perspective here, trying to direct the disciples to the most basic thought of his own mission, according to which truly royal dignity isn't recognized by the greatness of its message, but by the greatness of its dedication.

It is neither some especially momentous nor the only moment when the emissary of the Almighty calls the neighbor by name, making him realize that He knows him better than he knows the back of his own impoverished hand and that He sees him among victorious kings, while he is afraid of his own shadow.

Each weighty verse of the *apostolic platitudes* is almost permeated with this generous, commanding tone with which Jesus demonstrates near Caesarea Philippi the very practical value of his own self-knowledge, discrediting in advance the value of every self-knowledge that prefers speaking about Him to listening to Him.

The extensive documentation of the style of that most powerful authority to judge will be found by the attentive Reader even in Paul's letters, in which the Apostle *tap-dances* for the benefit of the faithful in Corinth² or Galatia, led astray by false teaching, bringing it home to them that in his absence they violated the warranty of power given to them by grace, thanks to which they had believed his preaching.

While doing that, he dismisses the good-deed hypocrisy of the latter with the famous (even though misunderstood until today) example of

¹ Judges 16:1-31

² 2 Corinthians 11:16-22; 12:1,11-13

Jesus' irony addressed to those who are offended by the true image of the saint to such a degree that it would have been easier for them to pluck out their eyes than to face his eagle eye¹.

The apostolic insight would have to remain a legend – if not for the large number of forcible gospel testimonies regarding their concern for the accuracy of the message – especially that the contemporary crudity in the exposition of the protocols of apostolic faith begs for a greatest hoax plebiscite.

There is something in these testimonies that successfully defends the Father's heritage from the otherwise justified allegation of the sages of this world of fawning common tastes. It is namely the unusually generous and unassuming ability of granting personal warranty for the spoken words, returning like a thunder of many a prophetic gloss echoed in a mountain hollow, on the note:

"I am."

It's impossible to understand the scene described once by the tax officer and arranged by his Master without invoking the sources of knowledge about the Most Holy. Every such an excessively greedy attempt is doomed to failure by getting stuck in a place that, like the scale needle, lures the merchants and moneychangers in the outer court of the temple, given to the Gentiles², to an unauthorized correction of the bothersome pronoun in the famous sentence of Jesus:

*"I also say to you that you are Peter,
and upon this rock I will build My church;
and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."*

And the exposition of the thought persistently following the Master is really blindingly easy. It sounds like this:

"People judge Me to be a prophet, even though they don't listen to prophets; you judge Me to be the Son of God, even though you don't listen to Me; I don't judge at all – I speak in the name of the one who sent Me and to whom I listen."

¹ Galatians 4:11-18

² Revelation 11:1-2

I don't need your testimony – it is you who need my testimony, so strive not to infringe upon it, so that it doesn't turn against you¹.

The difference between you and Me doesn't consist in the fact that I perform miracles and you don't, that I drive out evil spirits and you don't, but in the fact that I know where I came from and where I'm going, whereas you don't know that. You don't know who you are, so I'll tell you that:

You are people chosen by the Father to serve in my name, just as I was chosen by the Father to serve Him and fulfill his will. If you believe my words, you have access to the throne of grace, from which you were so far separated by a barrier of flesh and blood².

If you do what I like, wanting to be like I am, my Father will hear you, like He hears Me, and grant you not only credit for a new apartment in heaven, but also a reward for your toil and perseverance. You only have to precisely know what the Father is commissioning you to do through Me.

So look attentively and learn from Me, and may God the Father protect you from denying that you know Me, because it isn't within my powers, but the power of the one who appointed Me over you.

The only thing that is in my power is to become a ransom for you and a freewill offering of the enemies of the Father's inheritance, so that your own lives wouldn't be grasped by the greedy hands of your previous creditor – Satan."

The aim of the messianic utterance isn't, therefore – not in the least – to strengthen Peter, or any of the short-sighted pupils of the Master witnessing it, in some oracle worthy of their guts. After all, none of the disciples even dreamed about either the *Church* or the *gates of hell*. It is rather the demonstration of the messianic sensitivity to essential matters – that is, matters the existence of which doesn't depend on who passes what judgment on them, but on where he stands and from where he looks.

One could risk comparing this scene with Jesus' iconoclastic clash with the Jews who were wheedling Him, conventionally and deliberately called *believers* by John³, because it illustrates exactly the same dissonance be-

¹ John 12:44-50

² Ephesians 2:12-16

³ John 8:31-59

tween the blissful attestation of concession for the *messianic quirks* and the lightness, offending the ones unaware of their gravity, with which the badly chosen *favorite of the public* deals with the vanity of his compatriots, allowing for his own reputation to be compromised by their mean claims.

"*The Father likes Me, adores Me!*"¹ Jesus says to them, hinting in no uncertain terms at a serious infringement to the detriment of the testimony of the Father's warranty, wielded absolutely by Him, on the part of his *harmless adherents*. The conclusion of the witnesses of this *boast* is almost immediate – especially after this unruly enfant terrible imputes to Abraham's children the yoke of the bondage of sin.

According to them, the Father can't do what He likes. He can't like someone who doesn't like them and doesn't treat them according to the measure adapted by them. He can't say through the lips of his elect that *they are ragged and snotty and deserve a cold shower*.

Anyway, the blade of this clash, precisely sketched by John's hand, at the end of which *Abraham's children* reach for stones, makes one think that this time it is being wielded by an attentive witness of the event near Caesarea Philippi and a diligent student, whose victory was predicted not at all due to the doubtful value of his convictions concerning the Lord's servant, which were then similar to Peter's.

Although there is probably no interpretation of the above sentence that would be more frivolous than the one that – allegedly on its base – immediately predestines Peter for some *more special historic mission*, but – like earlier – according to the finest of all minds, it all depends on which side of the fence you are standing.

And a license from the mayor, where it is written in black and white that Christ's Church is worse than a working woman because it subsidizes its own disgrace and debasement, issued to the sages of this world, won't be enough for them. It won't suffice. In due time, they will need a small stone that they won't find. And I won't be the only one to take care of that.

February 14th, 2004

¹ John 8:54



Exposition

Matthew would probably be surprised by the number of controversies that his report of the event near Caesarea has been causing until this very day. Looking at them from a greater distance, one could even risk saying that the principalities of this world conspired so that people not only couldn't, but also wouldn't want to understand the scene described by the conscientious tax officer.

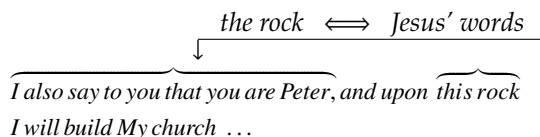
Yet the matter seems quite simple, if one doesn't loosely assume some special content, unknown to the hearts of the faithful, that the Master had been trying to implant in his dullish pupils, and also prudently presupposes that the references of all the Apostle's words find their sources – as it is with modest and transparent people – inside the very message.

Out of politeness towards the Holy One I will mention only one of the popular hypotheses claiming the very Author of the famous sentence to be the *rock* – that is, the designation of the bothersome pronoun this.

This interpretation, although not altogether absurd, is nevertheless a little weird, because it doesn't give a reasonable answer to the sober question about the logical connection between the statement concerning Peter and the announcement concerning the Church. The lack of this logic in this explanation is an open back door for the catholic *creative inventiveness* not worthy of wasting my breath. Of course, we know that Jesus [God] is a rock of salvation, but it is by no means explicitly stated that just in that place the Master had to refer to the truth – known to everyone, but otherwise very broad – professed in prophecies and psalms.

I suggest to assume a slightly different way of looking that sheds more light on the context and meaning of that event, simultaneously pinpointing the rightly chosen direction of the hypothesis that is only a little too passionately received in the Protestant circle.

I think that the source of the reference of the pronoun pointing to the rock isn't Jesus, but his word: precisely – the first clause of the sentence along with its object subclause. It is followed by two coordinate clauses, the first of which contains an adverbial of place constituting a reference to the first clause of the compound sentence.



The substantiation for such a conjecture becomes clearer when one treats the event in Caesarea as one of the many lessons given to the disciples, in which the Master confronts their self-awareness with his own, trying to approach them with a content alien to their minds and will.

By asking how much breadcrumbs they had gathered¹, from whom kings collected customs², why He washed the disciples' feet³, Jesus always gains their distracted attention for some detail, significant on the way to the truth. In my opinion, it is similar now as well, and the questioning of the Teacher should be here understood as an attempt to present to the eyes of the disciples the difference in the scope of the power of judgment given in turn: to the people outside, to whom – as the disciples already know⁴ – everything is presented in parables, to the disciples⁵ and to the Son of God⁶, of whose intentions and priorities the disciples have a very superficial understanding.

It is exactly with the intention of broadening the scope of awareness of the disciples' authority that Jesus explains the reason for which Peter – and other disciples along with him – should consider himself blessed; not *particularly distinguished* from among his companions (if something distinguishes him, it surely is his rashness), but as someone who obtained reliable information concerning the identity of Jesus. Unfortunately, that couldn't be said about the informers of the possessed,

¹ Matthew 16:5-12

² Matthew 17:22-27

³ John 13:12-20

⁴ Luke 8:9-10

⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:1-3

⁶ John 5:24-47

whose eagerness to proclaim revelations about the Messiah did admirably well without hard questions¹.

Pointing to the value of his own self-knowledge (on just this, and not a different rock) as constitutive for the works of future faith, Jesus firstly strengthens the disciples in the value of the warranty of the Spirit, promised to them, and secondly lets them know where the orders that will transform their lives and thinking about God's affairs are really coming from.

- People: *"We know you – you are a prophet, Eliah"*, etc.
- Disciples and demons: *"We know you – you are the Christ."*
- Jesus (about his disciple): *"I know you better than you know yourself."*

Here, the Lord's thought could be presented in the following way: *"People know Me as one of the prophets, even though they don't listen to prophets. You know Me as the Son of God, even though you don't know where I came from and where I'm going. I know you better than you know the backs of your own impoverished hands, because I listen to my Father and do what He commanded me. Imitate me, and you won't be disappointed in your hopes."*

It is befitting to add a pill of Paul's theology here, which serves the understanding of what the seal of God's foundation is. Namely:

*"The Lord knows those who are His", and
"Everyone who names the name of the Lord
is to abstain from wickedness."*²

It clarifies the meaning of the demonstration of the Master's knowledge concerning Peter's name. For only a shepherd who knows his sheep by name³ is able to effectively call them out, keeping them from evil. Of course Peter has a different opinion (*knows better*) concerning what is to soon happen on Golgotha, and that's why he gets an earful in an exemplary fashion.

¹ Acts 16:16-18; Luke 4:41

² 2 Timothy 2:19

³ John 10:1-18

Referring directly to one's own words doesn't belong to common linguistic habits, and that is, in my opinion, the source of the objective difficulty in accepting the role of the pronoun this as simply referring to the sentence: *And I tell you that you are Cephas ...*, marked by the word *rock*, the meaning of which is in intentional contrast with the explanation of Peter's name (*stone*).

It is worth, however, to consider the relevance of such a conjecture in the context of other utterances of the Messiah, especially those that – like this one – demonstrate to the disciples the measure of the Son's self-knowledge, about which the small witnesses of the warranty given to Him by the Father have a rather vague idea. Everywhere where Jesus is using a grammatical third person in reference to himself it can be assumed with confidence that in this indirect way He is imparting knowledge to them about the source of the power of judgment given to Him.

Let's take an example from the Gospel of John:

*"For just as the Father has life in Himself,
even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself;
and He gave Him authority to execute judgment,
because He is the Son of Man."*¹

Let's compare this to another one:

*"I proceeded forth and have come from God,
for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me."*²

It is easy to notice that the first passage could just as well sound like the second one, namely:

*"For just as the Father has life in Himself,
even so He gave to Me also to have life in Myself.
And He gave Me the authority to execute judgment,
because I am the Son of Man."*

But Jesus' aim here isn't only to *make a statement about who the Father is and what He gave to the Son*, but also to help his audience to accept the fact that the mouth of the Emissary proclaims and expresses the will

¹ John 5:26-27

² John 8:42

of the Father in the same way in which prophets proclaimed God's will earlier, putting the words given to them in the brackets: *Thus says the Lord* . . . Jesus is a revelator of this will and emphasizing his dependence on the Creator in this manner point-blank belongs to his *official duties*.

I think that in the famous sentence, directed to Peter, Jesus refers to the part of his utterance exactly as to the Father's words *put into his mouth* – after having drawn the attention of his rash disciple to the Father's highest prerogatives.

A similar kind of reference can be found even in the speech to the daughters of Jerusalem sobbing over the fate of the convict¹, in which Jesus, evoking Hoseah's prophecy², strengthens its purport with an oracle that what couldn't be seen differently by the Old Testament prophets than as a burden of a curse hanging over the chosen nation (*infertile wombs and dry breasts*) will soon – as a result of the madness of its leaders, the obvious testimony of which the women have before their very eyes – be seen as a sign of God's blessing.

The witness proclaims that these things – namely, the *blessings for infertile wombs and dry breasts* – will be fulfilled all the more inevitably, for He himself already sees these things in the form of the rejection by the elders of Israel of his mission (very fertile after all), serving God and people. If this murderous madness already takes place in times when the righteous are still being usually recognized by their attitude towards the Old Testament commandments, the grief of the women bewailing Him should rather *find such an object* that would be possible to preserve from God's wrath based on righteousness flowing from faith in the redeeming power of the bewailed one.

Please notice that the expression these things serves a very similar role as the pronoun this in the discussed verse from Matthew – the difference is that in Luke it is anchored in the words of Hosea, and in Matthew – in the words of Jesus. But in both these cases we deal with an internal reference, a self-reference to the words coming from a reliable source. Except that in Jerusalem Jesus quotes and expounds a prophet, whereas in Caesarea He presents to the eyes of the disciples the Father's word,

¹ Luke 23:27-31

² Hosea 9:14; 10:1-15

declaring what the Spirit of the Father's Promise hadn't yet revealed to the prophets.

This example can serve a better understanding of the expounded point of view, as it exhibits the very habit of the Galilean or – if it may be put like that – a certain *routine of messianic obligations*, which doesn't at all make the event in Caesarea something more special nor something that was to influence the fate of future generations more than many other, carefully devised, thick lessons of the Teacher of the blind, lame and deaf. People, however, wanted things to be *cheaper and simpler*, so they have what they have deserved or paid for, and not what they could have for free if they listened to the Lord's commandments more attentively.

In conclusion, the logos of the messianic intent could be pictured in the following way:

"Simon, son of John, everyone knows your name, just like everyone roughly knows Mine. But hardly anybody knows what your true name and calling is, just like it dawns on hardly anybody why I myself am here and whom I serve. The Person who knows this is my Father, who sent Me and who told Me your true name, and you know that I am the Son of God. And on what I know from Him (relying on the word given by Him) – and not on what I know from you or those who hold Me for one of the prophets – I will fulfill what no one has yet dreamt of."

July 30th, 2011

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, «Man shall not live on bread alone.»" And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, «You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.»" And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; for it is written, «He will command His angels concerning You to guard You,» and, «On their hands they will bear You up, So that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.»" And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, «You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.»" When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.

THE TEMPTER

My companion didn't look like a happy man. Although his service distinctions and savoir-faire could be envied by quite a few rulers, nonetheless the price that he paid for them was more or less excessive.

I didn't focus on his words too much, not wanting to embarrass him out of politeness, which I never skimmed on with people of lower birth, but also because it befitted me, as a traveler, to show proper heedfulness to the words of someone who seemed to pass in his own eyes for an authorized representative of the host of this earth.

Indeed, I could up-front place his speech among the most striking rites of human language. He imparted his knowledge to me unassumingly and sensitively, rather ordering my own thoughts and considerations than forcing his own.

In a word, he was someone whom I could sincerely admire for his ability to comprehend the otherwise stunning perspective of our journey. If he was a servant, he was a good one and didn't inconvenience the pilgrims. As befitted a true sage, I only racked my brain as to why there was so much fuss around me and what was the purpose of the advances, due at least to a king visiting a conquered land.

I was a little weary and I quickened at the intonation of my comrade who expressly made me understand that we approached the end of our expedition. What puzzled me was his somewhat changed facial expression, just as if this last official duty cooled down his calculations at the very thought that I could show a greater interest in exactly this place, of which he seemed to be almost ashamed.

At first glance it looked like some dilapidated hovel, but I couldn't say with a clear conscience that I looked in the direction indicated by my companion with my own eyes. I was rather spontaneously infected with his perspective, referring to this place as *designated for removal due to the lack of any benefits resulting from its existence*.

My companion risked a lot by carefully stating this almost official classification exactly in the moment when I was totally fed up with things that were magnificent, precious and profitable to mankind. My astonishment, however, and even disgust, was only awakened by his curt information concerning the character of the heavy-set building situated in a picturesque valley.

I didn't like it that my guide estimated my vanity so low as to strike a skydivers' base off his long list of places worthy of my attention.

I deliberated why he bothered me if there wasn't anything interesting there and I couldn't explain to myself the sense of the internal contradiction of his endeavors by anything but the guess that he could be someone else than who he wanted to pass for.

No servant worth his salt would allow for a situation that would compromise his dignity – especially if he had such a vast room for maneuver as he did. If he had to bring me here, it would mean that someone much more powerful than him directed this expedition and for sure it wasn't the lord whom my companion served.

These dilemmas lasted for a short moment. I had no intention of skydiving; I harbored at most a little liking and esteem for people with a taste for traveling space in a vertical direction. Listening with one ear to the political tone of my companion, I was overwhelmed with the impression that there was one too many of us.

I walked a few steps in the direction of the hangar, which really didn't look inviting. Some man in an overall approached us slowly. He acted expectantly and calmly, like someone told him not to pre-empt things.

He knew something I didn't. He turned to my companion and said – firmly, but without anger: “*The laundry was, is and will be.*” After which the latter suddenly got flabby, twisted and disappeared, and I woke up.

There was only one *laundry* that I knew well, and no skydivers' base, so I thought that I was again facing a riddle with one unknown quantity. It wasn't very hard anyway. Each child of God would understand the comparison of the testimony of an anointed emissary of his Father to a jump from heaven for the benefit of those looking out for hope from there. With a little luck, it would find a scrap of its childish imagination, in which a joy, close to its heart, was painted, caused by a long-awaited

landing operation of the Allies on the areas engulfed by the fire of the occupier.

But that's the end of it. For could it escape in one piece from flat, comic-like anecdotes about the desire for freedom from an alien yoke, having avoided the treacherous blade of the slaughterers of grace – that reflex of self-exaltation administered to the inattentive listeners who are slipping into the abyss, convinced that they're walking hand in hand with the Incarnate?

Who will tell them that this is not the way, that shortcuts aren't allowed, that after crossing the bridge they must walk up a steeply rising ridge and continue upstream, not losing the sight of the river, not looking behind and not talking to anyone? That it isn't allowed to get their clothes dirty, and if it happens, they need to stop and clean them up, because angels have no sense of humor.

Nobody. They will be snatched by a euphoria of liberation, that murderous illusion of unbelief insulting heaven with veiled flattery aimed at the warranty for the rapturous ones that is unknown to it – that prayerful shamelessness demanding a pay rise from the Righteous One while being a hundred times less worth it than human healthcare.

They will suddenly wake huddled against a cold boulder that they held for the *rock of their faith*, and the fear of discovering their disgraceful mistake, the hiccups and gibberish coming from the pulpits will humanize them and bring their hopes down to earth, where they won't learn contempt for moneybags handed in an inappropriate moment.

They will buy the thought of the goodness and omnipotence of the Holy One, but they will do everything not to smell of grace and feel how it spills over their insides, overflows them and lifts them where it came from. They will fear great thought and great love more than fire and it won't occur to them that they are offending the Creator by asking Him for so little – timidly asking whether He wouldn't like to confirm that He exists rather than begging for Him to come and destroy the earth and give them what He had promised.

For a moment, I felt embarrassed by the purport of the event shown to me in a dream. An unassuming man, looking at most like an aircraft mechanic, literally wiped out, or rather smashed my dignified companion with one word spoken with virtually no sacramental emphasis. In my

plain view he obliterated his intent in such an innocent way that I managed without the slightest effort to think about his act as of another minor favor of my great Lord.

Just as if He met my vague feelings halfway, liberally providing me with a measure for the judgment of the attempts of the seasoned seducer who seemed to pass for my magnanimous supporter, stressing, however, that the fact that I benefitted from it was not at all due to the greatness and integrity of my character.

A man in the face of demons is a fool like a boy in the face of a man – I knew this adage of powerful Gentile intellect better than others, but I knew as well that in a moment of trial even the wisest words slip out of the powerless hands of a mortal, and doubts in themselves, even big, aren't enough to reach a right decision. Then, one has to be able to lean on something, to rest one's gaze upon the unrivalled, flawless pattern of the Lord's will like on a beam of the heavenly ceiling, for at that time the human ear often doesn't listen too attentively to the quiet whisper of the prompter standing behind him.

I was, after all, just a royal stripling, a small coheir of great acres and only the fact that they rightfully belonged to me made my person a tasty treat for the satanic rebellion against the laws and provisions concerning the Father's heritage.

I would be able to cut to ribbons quite a few wise guys, tie a viper's tail into a knot and trample its small head underfoot; I was able to bind human wickedness into sheaves and thresh the grain on the threshing floor so that the chaff was seen from afar. I was able to keep up with sages and frolic with jesters, create and destroy, love and hate, show fervency to gold diggers and freeze in stony obstinacy in the way of liars and cowards.

To tell the truth, however, I had nothing to boast about. I had – for free and in a big way – all that for which many would have given themselves up into a tyrant's slavery for the rest of their days. But compared to others, I was bound by a much stronger yoke – one that could be broken only by the person who put it on me.

That is why my lectionary didn't provide for using the protection of anyone who demonstrated his conviction in a worse way than me. The skydiver did it much better, unlike any of the many champions of sal-

vation known to me. I knew his rules and didn't bow down to him nor thank him, because by that I would have offended the epaulettes of the power given to him: as opposed to him, I was able to do it.

He didn't make any gesture in my direction, didn't smile or greet me, but looked at me in the same way that he looked at that one and in a second I grasped that he saw someone behind me who curtly told him: "*Spare this one!*"

Not for anything in the world would I have turned back at that moment – not for fear for my own life, but because I already knew well that, standing behind me, there was someone who protected this life much more efficiently than my infamous contrariness and famed curiosity of things hidden since the foundation of the world.

I quickly laundered my clothes; they were a little stained by that loathsome type whose closeness I had tolerated almost until the end of my journey. It was the only thing that he was able to achieve, fully realizing the conditional character of the permission given to him concerning me, and that was exactly what he had managed to do.

Admittedly, he could count upon it that what was rejected by him wouldn't interest me, but also this time it wasn't given to him to sling mud at the family seal of a sinner reprieved by a royal decree.

I escaped uninjured only because I listened attentively to the *people who once fell from heaven and worthily told fantastic stories*. I was a lucky chap, which means I could consider myself a happy man with a clear conscience and didn't see a reason not to boast that I knew a really great and merciful Lord who demands from his charges only a bit of reason and elementary concern for the cleanness of the garment received as a gift.

Nobody could rival Him, and none of those who usually expect miracles of heroism and courage from people could even hold a candle to Him.

I was no coward, but what I saw couldn't be presented on any screen, even as a superthriller for a very demanding and very bored audience, because the heart of its director would have given out after shooting two frames, and the light accompanying such an event would have entirely destroyed every film.

I thought, therefore, that it was arranged quite cleverly and that since the Holy One doesn't disconcert the world too much with the might and power of his arsenal, I too had no reasons to fear whether the one who seeks the truth would find it without much effort, even at the dusk of human history. For the Lord's word will be fulfilled to the letter.

November 11th, 2004

THE STORY OF THE BACÓWKA

*"Tell me, O you whom my soul loves,
Where do you pasture your flock,
Where do you make it lie down at noon?
For why should I be like one who veils herself
Beside the flocks of your companions?"
"If you yourself do not know,
Most beautiful among women,
Go forth on the trail of the flock
And pasture your young goats
By the tents of the shepherds."*

The bacówka¹ could have borne a different name – at least owing to the besmirched consciences of Polish highlanders who won't be able to judge my choice fairly. But I haven't found a better picture, so I've expropriated this one.

In the bacówka – as the name indicates – there is the baca² – or in any case he sits there when he has nothing better to do. Without him, there would be no bacówka. There are also the juhasi³. I don't know how many. Maybe ten, maybe fifteen; they're difficult to count, because they keep mooching around, and when they gather all in one place, one has

¹ pron. [ba'ʦufka], derivative of *baca* (see note 2), the shelter and workplace of the *baca* and *juhasi* (see note 3) in the alps of the Podkarpacie region (translator's note).

² pron. [ba'ʦa], a dialectal term of Hungarian origin denoting an elder shepherd in the Podkarpacie region. Traditionally, the role of the *baca* was subservient to the interests of the farmers who entrusted him with their flocks. An oral agreement with each of the farmers specified the conditions, kind and amount of the charge for pasturing the sheep. Therefore, it had to be a man who was respected and wealthy enough for his

posessions to serve as a warranty of compensation for dead or lost animals.

The *baca* owned the herding and breeding tools and ensured board, clothing and shoes to the shepherds hired by him. The scope of his duties included the supervision of their work and tending the fire in the bacówka. In some regions, the *baca* owed his high social standing to the conviction of his creditors that he possessed supernatural powers (translator's note).

³ pron. [ju'haʦi], plural of *juhas*, from Hungarian – younger shepherd (translator's note).

something entirely different in mind than counting. It is a well-known fact that they are terrible loafers and the only person who is able to make them do anything is the baca – no one else.

It's hard to tell how he does it: he just looks at them and each one knows what to do. Or rather he knows what will happen if he doesn't do his duty. It rarely happens that one of the juhasi doesn't understand what the baca wants from him, even though the baca rarely says anything – in general he doesn't need language and expresses his will with signs that have a much better effect on the juhasi than road signs on drivers.

But sometimes it does happen and then the baca uses his strange language, which sounds like a thunder rolling over a mountain hollow, only that it awakens in the juhasi much greater fright than some thunderstorm. (Some things are impossible to describe, so I'm asking the Reader for his understanding for such flat approximations). The juhasi fear nothing and nobody – that's why they are who they are – but they fear the anger of the baca. It's simple – they are, after all, kind of his sons.

That is, not entirely. The baca has only one son and that son is one of the juhasi, and the others are like a reflection of the latter, but they are made equal with him in their rights, because the baca ruled that it should be so. One could say that the baca adopted them as sons and they can't forget that, but sometimes, when they get inebriated, they don't act as it befits the baca's sons (of course excluding the one the baca loves most).

That was exactly what happened the other time when they were laughing at the parrot. Although they were allowed to make fun of it at pleasure, and even laugh themselves sick, for the baca didn't withhold anything from his sons and didn't forbid them anything, but they didn't quite understand that it wasn't the right time for such amusement.

The parrot really was a perfect object of the frolics of the juhasi. It sat locked in a cage and thoughtlessly prattled some speeches learned by heart, and even its screechy voice alone could provoke every hungry young shepherd. It was moved from place to place, so that everyone on earth would be able to see this unsightly bird. But it wasn't enough for the people, so they gathered in crowds and went or flew to the place where it could sooner or later be expected. And they bowed down to it, and even – the horror! – prostrated themselves before it and tried to kiss its ugly beak, and the worst ones wanted it to be set free (that means, from

that cage in which it was luckily locked up and from which it wanted to escape itself).

Down there it was called *pope*, but the juhasi didn't know what a *pope* was, although they knew what a *parrot* was. That's why the baca, when they asked him one day what this vagary that was clambering there was, he told them it was a parrot. But he also told them – which was easy to forget, because the parrot drew the attention of every passer-by (that's what it was for) – to keep away from it, because everyone who touches it dies. And that wasn't funny anymore – not at all. That's why when the baca entered, and they were just making sport of the parrot, he gave them such a look that none of them would wish on their greatest enemy. Only one of the juhasi didn't laugh – it goes without saying which one.

The juhasi were fast learners, so when one morning the baca's son brought the young Grace on his beast, there was only one who forgot what the baca wanted. She was all covered in mud and her feet were bleeding, because, having run away into the mountains, she was wandering on the ridge in the dark, until, when descending it, she fell into some slough and were it not for the baca's son, she would have probably drowned.

All the juhasi saw in a single glance that she was a princess, for she was beautiful, even though smeared all over in mud, and the baca had told them what princesses look like, so that they wouldn't be fooled. The baca, by the way, greeted her as his own daughter and the juhasi were very happy, and even proud that they had such a beautiful sister.

No one knew her name, but the baca did and told everyone: "*This is Grace.*" And then one of the juhasi, the *unlearned* one, loudly announced: "*Oh, by the Grace of God!*" The baca didn't move a muscle. The juhasi all pounced at the chatterer and rubbed his ears with snow as vigorously as each of them would wish it on his enemy if he was to enrage the baca with some stupidity. And he wisened up immediately, so much that even the son of the baca didn't hold his parrot-like jokes against him.

Grace entered the shepherd's hut last, so according to the baca's rules she was treated as the first. Simply because she was worth it. Down there no one knew the baca anymore, and his son would be treated there

by someone who needed help as another tormentor and thug – the most ruthless of the kind.

If some wretch got as far as the crags and got stuck between the ravine down under and the rocky overhang over his head, seeing one of the juhasi coming to his aid, he would not only lose the remnants of hope for rescue, but, indeed, he would rather cut the lines and jump to certain death than allow himself to be pulled out by him.

The one responsible for it was of course the parrot, and in fact its venomous spittle, instilled into the veins of the gullible as an alleged elixir of life. It was it that convinced everyone so successfully of the wickedness of those who took from the poor to give to the rich. And that was exactly what the juhasi were doing with the greatest enthusiasm and dedication to the clear-sounding will of the baca.

So they hacked at the poor until splinters flew, and because the parrot had *wiped out* the rich, they didn't even have anyone to whom they could give what they took from the have-nots. That was the only reason why Grace got so much. Besides, who knows whether, if the baca's son hadn't pulled her out of the mire first, before she could see to whom she owed her rescue, she wouldn't have *dived* out of fear of a *ghost*, preferring death in the swamp to deliverance from the hands of an elusive renegade after whom an arrest warrant had long been issued. But you need to ask the baca about that.

Some of these riches were also bestowed on the ravenous juhasi – or rather they flowed down on them, for Grace was smiling at them so gratefully that they immediately forgot about all those moments when the thought about human abasement, at the sight of bowing down to dead bodies, sucked at their bowels to the limits of pain known only to few mortals.

A feast surely awaited them, and they liked to feast. It was only at the table that each of them looked like a mighty prince – and that was because the baca himself would sit down with them and bestow on all of them the same glance that invariably rested on his favorite and firstborn. Each of the juhasi was then lifted up by the father's pride and set so high that their manners, normally commanding and sometimes violent, were endowed with brightness and splendor that they didn't dare to desire.

There was, of course, wine in abundance, and frequent refills didn't hurt anyone. It wasn't exactly clear where all that food was suddenly coming from, but the juhasi rightly suspected that it had something to do with Grace, and with the baca's son who brought her. Actually, the baca could have ordained a feast without them as well, but somehow he didn't feel like it. Now, however, was the right time, and the baca – as it was his custom – raised his cup and mentioned the merits of everyone together and each one separately, so that nobody could think that he was there for a reason different than the one that the baca knew.

His words were a thousand times more dense and – so to speak – *more hardworking* than those that reached the ears of the juhasi during their pillaging expeditions to the roads frequented by the have-nots. So even though the baca omitted none of the numerous wonderful accomplishments of the juhasi, worthy of his commendation, and even reminded them of those that they had long forgotten, the speech that he made holding the cup raised above the table didn't cross the limits of decency that seemed nonexistent to the have-nots, because if they had seen them, the juhasi wouldn't have had to take those doleful scraps of their own sense of decency away from them by force – as well as their measure, distorted at first glance.

Thus, the prompt gesture of invitation for the members of the household to start the feast, amply sprinkled with wine, was to the juhasi very much like one of the many nods of the baca on which each of them would tackle the work committed to his own will and power.

March 9th, 2002

The baca's singing, like many local votive offerings of reparation to the supreme reign of the order of things, probably couldn't be explained better than with the picture of the contrast that was reflected in the greedy eyes of the have-nots with terror at the thought that they could lose in one moment this hope for the scrap of the concession of those greater than themselves, to which they desperately clung, and which they (in their own opinion) deserved because of saying some sacramental clause of earthly power or – what is even more contemptible – based on their sparsely documented obsequiousness towards its requirements.

At the threshold of the bacówka, one day was worth more than thousands of days spent cherishing the loftiest accomplishments of human spirit, and the sole fear at the news of the appearance of a member of its household down there was a sufficiently telling evidence of the bankruptcy of the virtues of the have-nots, modeled after the parrot's feathers. Therefore, convincing anyone that the general applause for the shows that were artfully staged there was a little exaggerated would equal wasting one's breath, which isn't befitting to the witnesses worthy only of great faith.

The baca's singing always started without any initial ceremony. The juhasi knew it well enough anyway to classify without fail every purpose that saw the need for it as a joke in bad taste. If someone insisted, looking for earthly analogies, to demonstrate the role that it played (not being limited by it), he could use the figure of a corypheus, whose leading in no way diminishes the glory of any of those guided by it. To the contrary – with each rich phrase it enlarges the space and might of the power given to the assembled much more lavishly than it ever happened in the Greek theatre.

The baca didn't sing in order to become greater – in order to experience some rapture, impress the audience or gain funds for charity or something like that in return – he sang because he was powerful, because he was experiencing rapture, because streams of living water were flowing from his heart like from the purest spring of creation, sweeping the audience away towards admiration for the gift of his spirit. The baca had nothing for sale; he was bereft of everything that could belie the testimony of his invincible and inexorable nature, and in his presence everyone was given a voice – everyone who desired to utter it.

One could say that if the limits of the rights and territory drawn by people lost their clarity within the perspective given to the juhasi, who were sizing up the earth with a gaze unreachable to mortals, like eagles over rocky clefts, the baca's singing was to the latter like an invisible limit of will, which designated a place for them, and which they knew much better than the have-nots, certain due to the parrot's doing that they weren't crossing the prohibited ones.

August 14th, 2002

The juhasi knew the Wilkinson razor brand well. Therefore, even though they themselves had completely no use for steel blades, they exhibited far-reaching understanding for the pilgrims grumbling a little at the dismal quality of that part of their own equipment, on which depended the very possibility of getting rid of unnecessary, and sometimes just unwelcome hair.

Unfortunately, in such a situation they could only recommend to them their own sword, and because they had no doubts whatsoever that at the sight of its unsheathed blade the wanderer would immediately forget – not only about the defects of his own apparition, but also what his name was and where he was born, their room for maneuver was very limited, especially that they specialized in much more efficient and productive ministries than shaving beards.

They would turn up their noses (everyone except the baca's son) every time the host of their shed would let the passions of earthly rulers, eagerly wreaking havoc on the presumptuous, bloated crowd of defenders of truth, do his job. But the baca didn't blame them for that vehemence, especially that he could count on the gravity of their battle gear when it befitted him to protect from disgrace his earthly coats-of-arms. Neither the small president of new America nor the great king of old Babylon, which fell, after all, not so long ago, would be fit for that task anymore.

They all had too short arms to carry out the strategy of the pastoral realm; neither were they able to draw correct conclusions based on the scale of their own accomplishments, so in the bacówka there was no talk of using their paltry arsenals in battling legalized crime.

The baca included as such mainly the degenerations that – without any embarrassment whatsoever – created in front of human eyes visions of bulky, overwhelming obstacles and burdens, the lifting of which couldn't be approached even by an Arab sheikh – let alone a mortal owing to God his very spirit of life.

In the old days, the adherents of these foul ideas were called *Pharisees*, but presently, in the age of general rearrangement of meanings and the *residential prudery* associated with it, the fetor of Pharisaic chicaneries has been avoided in an admirably inefficient way. Which was hardly surprising, because the sizeable heritage of great hypocrites brought enormous profits to the enemies of truth and even though almost everyone

knew that complicity in serpentine schemes doesn't set a good tone, it was difficult to find someone who would attach less importance to someone else's hypocrisy than to his own.

The abovementioned state of affairs wasn't, of course, influenced by the advertisements for razors, cleaning products, recipes for happy sex, conjugal life, good mood and perfect revenge. What is remarkable, the total blindness in matters of utmost importance was fostered exactly by the noisy and absolutely disjointed smear campaign against those who didn't in the least feel like suffering for millions of souls that loved special offers, competitions and prizes.

That's why one day the baca frowned and issued orders concerning the throng of the have-nots gazing at the well-known reprobate, operationally dubbed *Mr. Wilkinson*¹ by the famed perversity of the juhasi in a justified hope that the sober users of the blades of the superfine brand wouldn't be alienated from them by an undeserved equalization of a common slaughterer with a comparably modest manufacturer of very useful and quite durable tools.

For even the coquetry of the aforementioned hoodlum, in front of whom crowds kneeled down, was in terrible taste, which couldn't be said about the packages with two swords. A routine ploy of his slightly languid prophetic intuition was discrediting in advance all the reservations concerning the reliability of the foundations of his own self-knowledge, expressed in formulating in front of the neighbors sacramental affirmations that he might lack some traits, but not humility.

He substantiated his public utility access with ... his own desire. And he was doing it so forcibly that at the very sound of this spell it seemed that everyone *became meek*, adopting appropriate facial expressions and poses expected from them by that thick-witted humbug.

"I want, therefore I am, I desire, therefore I have" – that was the first thing that he wanted engraved on every bad conscience, a little too excessively affected by the fate of the fleeting world. The juhasi, therefore, took very thorough care of him, so that none of the outsiders would be

¹ The Reader will obtain information about the accomplishments of David Wilkerson, a well-known Protestant preacher and pastor,

at any Christian marketplace. Here, he only needs to know that the talk is about this very wolf in sheep's clothing (author's note).

able to deny that – indeed – he had precisely and exclusively what he wanted.

To begin with, they blinded him – so he was to toss until the end of his days in search of arguments against the baca. He gropingly found them without much trouble (of course they were utterly meaningless), because the demand for spiritualized personages still didn't match their market supply and spasms of ecstasy at the sight of oddballs as mendacious as him belonged to the most common expressions of nonchalance towards the will and power of the Holy One.

His tenderness towards his adherents would move (and moved) many a lover of intoxicating liquors. In order not to – God forbid! – exalt himself above others, he openly denied being a prophet, which was supposed to mean that he wasn't anyone special to the Almighty (only the last thing was true) and that . . . maybe not everyone, but for sure very many could boast both having his virtues and the undeserved, and *de facto* doubtful gifts of his spirit.

The baca was totally unimpressed by this hogwash; it only told him that the juhasi were doing well and properly tied the culprit, having previously gotten him drunk until senseless. It only remained to wait for the spiritual vomit of that liar. It came soon in the form of a severe hangover and indigestion, the very sight of which was to be a comfort to the freeloaders and loafers gathered around him.

Readily accommodating the concerted will of his debtors, this pitchman arranged spectacles in which he incised his body with blunt razors, so that life-giving blood would gush from him like from a barrel. But he had to repeat himself often, because this elixir didn't always achieve the effect that he expected.

Admittedly, his reserves were quite substantial, but if someone accidentally disclosed that secret essence of his advantage over the neighbors, this thug, drunk with the blood of the saints, wouldn't be able to beguile others with the gloss of his own destitution with such impunity anymore. In any case, it would have to be much more crafty than the devious self-advertisement sounding like this:

*"I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet;
for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs.*

*But the Lord took me from following the flock
and the Lord said to me, «Go prophesy to My people Israel» ...”*

Unfortunately, the details of this wrongly addressed card with a return address weren't too convincing. For Amos directed his well-known retort to a priest of an idolatrous temple and it had no other goal than the authentication among the remnant of the people, stupefied with lies, of the rightful conviction that the Almighty knew well whom He had sent and the risk of correcting his fancy fell on the daredevil's head at his own wish.

Whereas Mr. Wilkinson's stinginess made him seek among the neighbors for applause for a headgear so tasteless that even a donkey would have the full right to kick an approaching rider wearing it on his head. That's what he wanted anyway – so he sought to propagate far and wide this and many other demonstrations of his own glory, for which he was to receive exemplary blows in his insolent mug from those who sinned against him by having the donkeys' wisdom.

Then he pointed fingers at them so vehemently that it would seem that the remains of his unstable sense of decency regained on that occasion the rank of a texture of a prophetic oracle, requested of him by the masses of fighters for freedom, equality and fraternity, thirsty for impure blood.

He forgave his adversaries so loudly that his faithful were overcome with panic at the very thought of the possibility that the numerous transgressors against the persecuted one could not care in the least about such a costly and spectacular trouble. So they didn't allow it to speak, thinking in their delusion that they were contributing to the glory of the Eternal One, ignoring the legitimacy of the heavy whipping that this gauche pimp was receiving over and over again from the convicts of a pronouncement, much lighter, but equally binding, of a just sentence.

He only wasn't able to forgive those who had something to say that he hadn't the slightest notion of – it was beyond his strength. Revelation belonged to him and his horde, and that was it – so the news that God opened the eyes of someone who would spit at the very sight of one of the safebreakers of grace, eternally grateful to him, caused him no little irritation.

His stinginess was an open secret, because it really didn't require great intelligence and imagination to discredit the value of his messages, in which the nearly only negative examples were the animators of spiritual *chain letters of happiness* and little pyramids with dull, self-satisfied heads at the top.

As a matter of fact, he envied everyone who didn't earn his blissfulness with enough hard work, so it was understandable that the promise of eternal rest and freedom from the yoke alien to God in his mouth didn't provide for even a measly advance payment on the account of the future glory of its otherwise generous Sponsor.

Not the slightest signs of thanksgiving worthy of a shepherd's attention reached the baca from the direction of his districts anyway. For even though Mr. Wilkinson's discovery that it is possible not to harm oneself had its gravity, the conclusions from this too-noisy revelation didn't convince even the healthy cattle, let alone those whose terrible bonds were split with a single cut only by the juhasi, who – so to speak – didn't have too great respect for the accomplishments of human hands by definition.

Flowery demonstrations of holy indignation, elaborated in the sweat of his brow by this man hired to work *in the black economy*, were to be – according to the decision of the baca – his only life and conscience insurance policy, which he was told to wave in front of the noses of juicy, but mean mockers and scoffers.

* * *

Yes ... the juhasi chewed him out. They made him brag about visions of the attention and bows of earthly rulers directed by the latter to his consulting company dealing with *exporting* impurities that were cumbersome to the environment. The esteem for the worldwide successes of this true amoeba, comparable to moderate, but measurable respect for the accomplishments of Mac Donald, formed around him a nimbus of a champion of the rights of the rejected and battered by fate, whom this self-appointed surety of the promises of the Almighty managed to ensure of the purity and magnanimity of his own intentions.

Thousands of young people were dropping their cigarettes, syringes and bottles, and because of the consent of Mr. Wilkinson's company to utilize the *post-production waste* of the all-powerful prosperity flattered

the authorities, the *patron of truth* could feel free from the dangers once faced by its favorites.

He didn't feel like that, however, because the juhasi took care of that, dumping on his shoulders a burden of human wickedness so great that it would be fitting for the Galilean to be amazed in due time by the sacrifice, so inappropriate in the eyes of his Empowerer, with which this American Mr. Clean won those thirsty for any perspective whatsoever – let it be unrealistic.

Beggars can't be choosers. So the juhasi supported, without the slightest qualms, the announcement of this pimp, whose insulting calumnies directed at the saints found a sizable hearing among blind grinders of the patents of the Righteous One. Since the baca himself wasn't giving them any chance for sobering up before the imminent day of judgment anymore, all the less could be expected from his adopted sons, among whom his firstborn firmly held the sway.

The number of his opinions about key issues wasn't as stunning as could be inferred from the number of lengthy and somewhat dull dissertations that were quickly travelling through the whole world thanks to the media (cursed by him a little over the top), full of madness and debauchery – able, however, without an appropriate reciprocity, to serve their bitter enemy.

Mr. Wilkinson didn't look too embarrassed by such a drastic disproportion between the quality of the services used by him and the ones he offered himself, and somehow he didn't hear (he was as deaf as a post) the reasonable persuasions that could have made him aware that the absolute obligation of every servant – and for sure of one claiming the nimbus of eternal glory – is learning the basic principles of at least his native language.

The purchasing power of his books was, however, so big that the juhasi weren't inclined to reflexes of mercy for the translators of his grammatical hieroglyphics, who were secretly execrating the mental sloppiness and epidemic contempt for the essential principles of good manners of this widely-read *quack and specialist in the Spirit of wisdom and reason*.

Maybe they would even have forgiven him the shortcomings of style, in which categorical imperatives (*we have to*, *we should*, and even those more pleasant to the ear: *I want*, *I desire*) acted in his mechanical mouth

as a nutcracker – for he secretly liked nuts. But his persecution mania was already impossible to substantiate by any motives comprehensible to the juhasi – at most by the fear of a piglet fattened for the day of slaughter, which can be put out of its misery in only one way – which considerably accelerated the executive procedures applied by them in such cases.

Had he demonstrated in his prophecies even a trace of conviction as to what would happen to himself when what he had predicted for his neighbors would come true, the juhasi wouldn't have clubbed him to death so ceremoniously – in a manner reserved for the biggest criminals, those pompous, *super-pious* chatterers who despise obedience like the raging sea billows crashing on a coastal rock.

* * *

The baca wasn't hung up on details and maybe he could have dismissed with his powerful hand the philistinism of the fat crowd with eyes fixed on him like on a picture. But he deemed the enticing of the country from which, after all, the parrot came, a bit too much – especially that the parrot itself treated with deep caution Mr. Wilkinson's prophecy of a great awakening that was to allegedly start there. It wasn't that the awakening wouldn't have suited the parrot. By no means – it was that the American mafioso didn't entirely fulfill the awakening criteria established and very strictly enforced by the court of the parrot.

The rejection of his outstretched hand that could have freed the youth, owing to God their very spirit of life, from the addictions of spitting into the river and in the direction of the parrot's altars, was to Mr. Wilkinson an inconceivable extravagance, but above all else an insult to the rank of the accomplishments, sufficiently advertised under the *Teen Challenge* sign, which resonated merely among a measly bunch of the most mendacious proponents of self-salvation.

So the revenge of the *godfather* for this irresponsible affront was pretty perfidious and baca's nostrils stretched wide as an expression of contempt for this offended boozier when he heard from his own mouth about the *oracle of the Lord* that was to ensure the careless inhabitants of this country of their special historic role in the saving mission to the remaining part of the Old World, not very favorable of the latter.

The baca couldn't let him get away with this veiled flattery directed at the Lachowie¹, overcome by strong wine anyway, because the place of his coat-of-arms, well-known to him and much more modest than Mr. Wilkinson's façade, testified of something quite to the contrary. No awakening whatsoever was anticipated there (even though if something was to *awaken*, it would happen there at the earliest) – not even a moderate interest in the guidelines that could have led to an awakening.

In a word, nowhere was the disgust towards the frolic of the spendthrift son as deep as in the very mainstay of the parrot's jokes about forbidden topics and the baca sternly objected that some newcomer from overseas should add to the hypocrisy of that country the specter of his own disgrace. Then its gullible inhabitants would be able to belatedly justify themselves by saying that they were misled by some mountebank, and the baca, angry with them, had no intention of equipping them with even such a miserable asset.

The trouble of the baca was substantiated by a purely monopolistic reason, very well understood, however, by the people who would thoroughly examine where the wind blew before giving an opinion-forming voice to a foreign capital consortium. For he was under no illusions that even if a wind blowing from the mountains really aerated this backwater, so irksome to him, Mr. Wilkinson would be the last to be delighted with such an unexpected fulfillment of his own prophecy.

Opinions, as it has already been mentioned, were the only measurable asset of this knight-errant, and because the clan of the parrot rightly assessed their element as a threat to its own domain, the *sanitation technologies* of the entrepreneur from overseas met with an understandable resistance of the *virgin with child oligarchy*, disinclined towards costly innovations. Its aloof silence towards Mr. Wilkinson's noble proposition was rightly deemed by the baca an unnecessary risk of endowing the prince from overseas with the laurel of the local martyr for the truth – all the more so due to the fact that this country couldn't complain about the lack of an afflicted pose.

¹ alternation of *Lechici* (*Lehites*), which means descendants of *Lech*, the legendary protoplast of the Polish state. One of the ancient designations of the inhabitants of its area (translator's note).

The besotted parrot didn't appreciate, and didn't even notice (to its own undoing, of course) that courtesy of its enemy and the eagle eye of the baca as well as his commissions to the juhasi were still to serve the good of only a few, sobered up in time by the sight of a living embodiment of extraterrestrial strategies, from among which only the least showy one left a saving back door for those who were used to seeking light at its Source.

The juhasi didn't have the slightest difficulties with the implementation of the arrangements of the baca and the hurry of those sworn loafers resulted exclusively from their pure calculation. They wouldn't exchange the supper in the bacówka for any splendors or comforts available on earth, and putting on the line of the merits for the throne of grace the bleeding unlike the one to which they owed their own honor of the life blessed by the baca was entirely out of question to them.

And Mr. Wilkinson was just one of many noisy roisters who were to be somewhat surprised by the speech of the Judge of the living and the dead, and a costly delay of the juhasi with the execution of the sentence that had been long pronounced on him would have to postpone a little the perspective of the meal, amply sprinkled with the baca's wine, which didn't amuse them at all.

The day was coming to a close.

September 14th, 2002

Every beekeeper would easily understand the embarrassment of a juhás on seeing the earthly tidings which placed the value of the efforts of their patient and hardworking overseer far below the plotting of brazen intruders. The baca was probably the least surprised by this unprecedented perversity, but he too could sometimes envy (if he feared any competition) the beekeepers who worked in their own apiaries without gloves or hat.

Taking care of the drones belonged to the duties of the worker bees, toiling in the sweat of their brows, and the status of the queen mother seemed to be an attribute of capricious and voracious ephemerides to whom the begetting of offspring worthy of the apiarist's toil was the last of their least urgent tasks.

Although the equipment of the juhasi was solid enough to enable a discrete (unnoticed by anyone) intervention in the neglected nests of Christian nomenclature, but also an open and equally successful demonstration of the authority given to them, nevertheless they preferred to look in the direction of their commander first, than to contribute on their own account to the disarray, terrible anyway, among the defenders of the one and only truth.

It was rarely profitable for the baca to authenticate his own prerogatives anymore and he only pondered for a little longer (and it never lasted more than a spilt of a second) such terms that could accelerate a little the reckoning of entries in the book of life. Only he knew what these terms were, so the juhasi prudently spared their anger to the convicts shackled with hands mightier than their own, in order not to interfere with their patron's accounts.

So they didn't have a lot of work; their competencies were, after all, those of children who guarded – the way they could (and they could do much) – the rank of God's testimony. And to the children who loved their father it was really child's play and at most the opening of human eyes to them required the baca's nod.

And he wasn't eager to put the seal of his authority under the miracles the borrowed status of God's righteousness of which was a shameless affront to the requirements of common human decency. He would rather be inclined to advise a distracted bigot or a gullible chatterer to pluck out her eyes or cut his tongue than to supply any of his devoted servants in mandates conducive to relief in bodily infirmity, temporary to them.

The time for salutary advice was, however, long gone and only a truly extraordinary circumstance could oblige the baca to commit to the authority and might of a young shepherd the utterly redundant dilemmas of some lost wanderer who became too familiar with the abominable and devious clan of the parrot, but its imagined burdens were out of his way.

As for healings, he commissioned them in due time to a bunch of loafers and mountebanks in order to give a hard time to the insolent plagiarists of the Master from Nazareth (who loved to entice weak souls with visions of happiness and peace with God) and appointed to them, as robbers' share in this difficult mission, the earthly glory of the merited for the gospel.

Nobody had any idea what the gospel was anymore, so such a transaction didn't cost the baca much. Without much ado – as he had done many a time before – he gave the unfaithful into the hands of their enemies.

The have-nots would gladly be healed by God, but they didn't like walking with Him – they preferred for Him to bother to come to them often, because the visits of the *apostles* flattered their vanity to no end. The balance was right and everyone had what he had wished for – and, after all, it was all that mattered.

December 23rd, 2002

The juhasi were thoroughly searching the area of the blasphemous conflagration, looking for rebels who, because of the baca, grew weary of the infertile contestation of the destitution of their neighbors that they were made aware of, and their justified boredom with the futility of others' actions hadn't yet been transformed into the shape – pleasing to the parrot – of a slightly belated decadence tamely lamenting the decline of morals.

Lucifer's vegetable garden, although indeed a little neglected, was tidy enough for even the smallest space of life-giving soil to be contaminated by poisonous miasma of human will hateful to God and piled with heaps of useless half-truths spewed out by the aforementioned evangelists with a self-denial worthy of the nimbuses of the greatest hypocrites. Therefore, the yield of the work of the juhasi was rather paltry if compared to the fruit of the mass activity of the sellers of stimulants labeled *Jesus*.

The baca, however, evaluated it with an unearthly measure and each of his adopted sons could experience his parental warmth and his pride because of his own achievements, when upon return he submitted to his empowerer protocols from events worthy of the baca's attention. And they saw a thing or two ...

They saw funereal manifestations for the sake of despairing parents whose children had been taken away from them and obsequious banners defying heavens at almost every news of a death of a liar and a fraud. In licensed joints they saw cages full of rats hanging from the ceilings, boasting about their elevation and most exalted views.

They saw the treacherous depths of idolatrous heroism, in which experts in human maladies sought refreshment from the sweltering heat

pouring down from heaven, luring into their whirlpools the people heedless of the Galilean's warnings.

They watched from afar the tributes of blind men and pilgrimages of the lame, who envied the beauty, might and fame of the living God among those despised by themselves. They saw boys and girls, stupefied by fear and seduced by the charm of the corpse that is an insult to God.

They looked at the torn scraps of life thrown to the hyenas, which instead of a burial dreamed to become the food for the beasts.

They finally saw a have-not who shuddered when he heard the answer to the question that had haunted his soul: *"Who are you, Lord?"* – and whom the baca, as a justified exception, allowed to take a fresh breath to the confusion of those who denied the truth the authority over the freshness and power of human sensations.

The codes of the protocols were, of course, impossible to crack even to the greatest hackers of the Word of God. Therefore, the disclosure of even a considerable part of the letter of those protocols, engraved in stone (the baca didn't sanction other media of information) could give mortals nausea and diarrhea at most, which ailments belonged to the most common ones. That is why it was impossible to determine the origin of the mysterious message based on them – unless some expert remembered what causes vomiting in liars. The dementia in that case was, however, cruel, for the baca – as it has already been mentioned – gave everyone to the will and authority of flatterers.

The risk of the confusion of those unfamiliar with the precepts of the art of survival when encountering encoded news (even though close to a hundred per cent) was disproportionately small compared to the absolute guarantee that without the knowledge and will of the baca no one would manage to benefit from them.

For the baca didn't specialize in canvassing life and conscience insurances, and he lavished the tickets for the wedding feast that had already been announced a long time ago quite cautiously, giving them not to those who wanted to have them, but to those who were worthy of them.

He could afford an indeed stunning tolerance towards those who run out of words at the sight of controlled leaks from the line of the most real of battlefronts, and who, faced with the dictum of the decrees contained in them were only able to say that it was a bad joke.

It wasn't, however, a joke, but camouflage, containing also such jokes that nobody on earth could afford anymore. The joker himself slept soundly, because rash and usually very cumbersome denying of unverified hearsay about the supposedly unpredictable policy of the Holy One wasn't within his competence.

The stingy opinion-forming instances where people tried to inquire about the recidivism of the juhasi kept their lips sealed, afraid of exposing themselves to open ridicule and of the loss of influence (which in fact they didn't have), so its bothersome status soon wore thin, because no one felt like wrestling with the truth that was one great unknown.

It didn't hamper the domain of authority held by the baca in any way, for he instructed his faithful youth in advance not to get into any brawls, but to throw something heavy here and there, so that in due time the liars wouldn't have any grounds for cheap justifications and excuses, and the lucky ones wouldn't grumble too much that no one put up a guidepost for them.

December 27th, 2002

AFTERWORD

Dear Reader,

reading this book will raise in you a lot of questions and doubts concerning the credibility and validity of the author's statements. Here, I would like to meet some of them halfway, providing you first hand with the premises necessary for their painless settlement.

The book is not a part of any formula, scheme or structure of any additional activity – it's just a book, nothing more, so you won't find me in any of the places where people talk about Christ, do something in his name and assure their neighbors that they're serving Him faithfully.

My assets, therefore, are neither as showy nor as passionate as the splendor and the envelope of the contemporary Christian ministry. They have, however, a trump card that is difficult to challenge: they are real news, that is a testimony of a truth that is not common knowledge (for it hasn't been made available to the public), not supported by any religious group known to you and, moreover, quite coarse.

This news is, roughly, that the current (not to say *nominal*) image of the figure of the Originator of faith of all the Christian denominations is false, inconsistent with the spirit and norm of apostolic faith, the power and greatness of which has once been fostered by an extraordinary Galilean. And because this news is neither rewarding nor anticipated, you would honor the truth, Reader, by granting me – its troublesome harbinger – appropriate consideration.

Of course, it's not about my rights and privileges – which I know, like I know my place and my not-so-glorious history. It's rather about the space in your mind for things that are new, unexpected or puzzling, the resolution of which may soon be delivered by a will greater and wiser than mine.

I don't want you to irretrievably lose something that you value today as a result of an ordinary disinclination to change your own thought patterns or due to becoming groundlessly prejudiced against me. A verifica-

tion of views in the present time and place, through the author's intent, will simply be less costly to you.

When working on the expositions of difficult or just wrongly interpreted passages in the Scripture I was trying to focus your attention only on such facts in the light of which the contemporary image of Jesus, and along with it the picture of his thought and Spirit, appears inconsistent with the truth and common sense.

Admittedly, I wasn't very demanding with myself in that, but perhaps only because as a foundry worker I lacked the time, strength and worker's zeal for them. I also uncouthly deemed that if the revelations that I became aware of served me well, they would also nourish and strengthen the hands and heads of my neighbors who are as indiscriminate as myself.

It is a legitimate and objectively non-trivial issue whether the rank of this statement indeed has any significance for the judgment of the prerogatives of the Christian faith – such significance that is consistent with the author's self-knowledge. Or, in other words: whether the convictions, norms and religious practice of Christ's adherents can count on the lenience of the Judge if in my judgment of the foundations of this faith there is something more than the proverbial kernel of truth.

Of course, there will be those among the Readers who will deny the value of that self-knowledge in advance, stating that none of the iron doctrines of the Christian faith provides for its existence. But I assume here that their judgment doesn't mean much to you, and you yourself have some gumption.

The foundation of true Christian faith is by no means the conviction of the real value of the work of Redemption or any other of the memorable achievements of the Galilean and his bunch. Someone who thinks so is in error – serious and costly in terms of life. Whereas according to the Scripture the foundation of true Christian faith is its root, that is He himself, Christ, and by the Spirit given by the Master all the disciples' actions serve the care of his image.

Because there can only be one root, even if the foundation referring to his name is solid, serves the people, strengthens and invigorates them, if it is not that one and only that was once worthy of apostolic attention, all

its glory is an insult to the truth, deprives God of glory and on the day of the judgment it will become something less than a ruin.

The obviousness of this truth may not be clear to the Reader, because nowhere in the modern literature and in no Christian denomination will he find any traces of honest efforts to promote it. Certainly, any open attempt at discrediting Christ's role for the Christian faith is nowadays treated as elementary school humor, but the Scripture translators and exegetes – poring over the Messiah's unsolved riddles and persistently providing the amateurs of Christian crosswords with new charades and puzzles – aren't accompanied by a similar sense of humor.

Though the author's perspective is high, it isn't as vain or haughty as the delusive attitudes of the scholars, theologians or evangelists persuading others to change their thinking in the name of Christ. It's not so much that they don't have even a vague idea of what the Messiah thought and felt – after all, ignorance isn't a sin – as that they don't really feel like thinking differently than Origen, Augustine, the pope, Tozer or Wilkerson.

Compared to the groveling, pseudo-godly rhetoric of those enlightened dogmatists, my speech is rather down-to-earth, for – unlike them – it allows for the Reader's commonsense reflection, making of the premises provided to his conscience rather a meaty snack stirring up the appetite for the truth than a textbook set of ready answers for pious questions that could arise in his head.

Obviously, the Reader is fully entitled to asses my literary excesses as distasteful, not serving the truth and a clear conscience – what is more, I indeed consider such cursory judgment of my prerogatives as to some degree inevitable. It is a matter of taste and – like every taste – it requires an appropriate distance. In my view, however, the problem doesn't lie in what my Reader thinks about me or God and what he likes, but in that he would be able (because I think he isn't) to learn what God thinks about himself and whether He knows him at all. And my hope is that, at least in this small, but objectively very important matter, I will be able to obtain from the Reader a vote of confidence, which is necessary to me and is to serve his own will and conscience.

I'm not saying that the power of the contemporary knowledge about the Savior of the world owes its existence on the global denomination

market to the front-running of Gutenberg and the banners of the Christian propaganda that can't read – I am not against the media as long as they are treated as useful machines.

Remaining in my right mind, I'm saying something quite to the contrary and much more stunning: the power of Christianity doesn't stem from the truth or even propaganda, but from true, real evil, making use of the lively and deep hatred towards the truth of very well-read people. There is no way to persuade them to accept my modest point of view due to the weight and inertia of their spiritual assets.

This guarded inertia, of course, is consistent with the interests of the indolence of thoughtless people who are insensitive to commonsense persuasions. And because neither oligarchy nor democracy was a model of the future order and structure to the Messiah, I care, Reader, for you to be willing to spend at least one hour one-to-one with my conviction and hold a vote of no confidence for the oracles listening intently to the voice and will of the people, and treat graciously the unquestionable limitations of my testimony that is not bound by them.

In due time, it will be paid back to you in gold, for I as well won't be judged for how many times I inconsiderately stepped into shit, got drunk as a skunk or lost balance having slipped on a banana peel, but for how many times I managed to do what I ought to.

Christian culture hasn't grown on truth – even as the Galilean had expected. It has grown and spread luxuriantly on falsehood which – until this very day – drains human resources and minds of all features and characteristics that could make Christ's adherents resemble Him. It is a destructive operation, powerful and peremptory, and I wouldn't like you, while you're searching for the truth, to delude yourself concerning any objective values of the modern savior-like pyrotechnics and fireworks shows, having appropriately distanced yourself from those media phenomena, ruining true life and hope.

It isn't reasonable to look for value in the domain that has been insulting the sources that it invokes for almost two thousand years. If the measure and determination of human inquisitiveness serving the progress of civilization was compared to the measure wielded by the commentators of the gospel testimonies, then, compared to the assets and fruit of the faith applying it, the latter has to come out like a carcass in the pres-

ence of a healthy mare or the stubbornness of a slacker compared to the will of a sage.

Today, there is literally nothing that would testify that Christians by name are supported by a powerful Spirit and superhuman mind. They are unsteady in their judgments, cowardly, dull, audacious and arrogant towards those greater than themselves, holding themselves to be protégés of the assets and privileges of domains that they should be ashamed of. Their works rightly cause reluctance and aversion, because they feed on human poverty more greedily than bloodthirsty sharks, hyenas or leeches.

Whereas it is reasonable and credible to dispute the value of their savior-like heritage – not at all because of medieval crusades, witch burning, priestly pedophilia or its worldwide splendor and luxuries for greedy VIPs (after all, these are only the fruits of their exegesis that is blind to the true greatness of the Master) – but because of the impossibility of remaining sane after accepting their false outlook, ludicrous to common sense.

A bad tree cannot produce good fruit, Reader. If you believe that, you're holding the thin thread that can lead you to the truth – provided that you won't rip that thread – it can give you, or even return to you the thing that is the substance of your humanity hidden in God. It can make it so that, instead of repeating after others slogans devoid of meaning in your own mouth and acting like in a dream, you will wake up from it with a name worthy of your faith in a new heart. Less can't be wished to a man who searches for the truth – and it isn't worth it to wish him more either.

It is important, Reader, for you to thoroughly understand what is said here point-blank and from what you are fully entitled to draw the conclusion that if you are tied to any of the Christian communities, in my view you are and will still be forced to serve a false God – that there is no such might that could protect you from such a miserable fate – and this dictum comes from the mouth of an experienced, quite fine mind, able and trained in actively and passively resisting the servants of falsehood.

In the Scripture, the testing of faith in Christ isn't foretold as *exciting mountain trips* or *relaxation on a seaside beach*, but as tough spiritual combat, in which victory belongs to him who is able to save his energy and avoid the traps set on the road. One can't practice that by listening to

fairy tales for good children and equally bad jokes about the *ignorance of the father of lies*, while nodding in assent to morons and frowning on God's children as a result of their cunctation.

When, therefore, it accidentally happens that you stand up for the disgrace discovered and pointed out by me, first think it through: whether you can afford it and whether the stake isn't rather your own skin and soul – you surely won't lose because of this delay and the short stop in the light of my lamp. It's not a great feat to preach long and wise sermons – a truly great feat is to be able to benefit from them in time.

Paweł Zelwan

Kaletnik, Poland, June 15th, 2014



The book "Jesus Wanted" is a personal call for the verification of common representations of the figure and identity of the Originator of Christian faith. The call is addressed primarily to believers, but only due to the same reason why the Master of Nazareth gave priority access to the benefits of the Gospel to the elect of his Father.

I therefore also direct the invitation to face the thought and faith contained herein to Readers who are only loosely or even antagonistically connected to the Christian tradition, hoping to foster their discovery that the dislike towards the twofold distinctions of all the denominations of this religion has its grounds not in the truth about the Savior of the world, but in the passionate lies about his alleged predilections. I wish them that they would be able to draw reasonable, vital conclusions from that fact.

Paweł Zelwan

"I met the baker recently. He was busy. There were fewer and fewer freeloaders and he had to post his ads in the Internet among millions of useless pieces of information about this vale, bought and sold for pittance. «I will save a soul without any qualms. I ensure clothing, board and accommodation, and a one-way ticket.» It's hard to believe, but that's how (roughly) these inconspicuous, shocking announcements sounded. I never knew anyone who would abase himself so much. But he knows well the great worth of a life and a glimmer of hope given to those bereft of honor for a moribund corpse."

(fragment of the story *Gold for the bold*)

"Why is it then that for centuries both believers and unbelievers have wanted to see in the lot of the younger son the image of human abjection and moral decline (even though it has very little in common with the true fall), and in the eyes of his father the readiness to forgive the faults of his offspring (even though it finds no expression in the mouth of the great master)? What is the profligacy of the younger son: the anti-pattern of true godliness, or maybe its most vivid embodiment, carried in the hearts of this world's greatest ones? Who is the elder of the two sons: a small jealous man or a deceitful minion of slander to the ones who believe in the power of the secret order given to the younger one by the father?"

(fragment of the exposition of the story *The swineherd*)

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